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THE

WORKS OF
W. E. HENLEY

VOLUME

III

WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY

ESSAYS

VOL. I

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HENRY FIELDING

1707-1754

THEY are not few that have dealt with Henry Fielding's work and fame; but not too many of them have done the best by him. The most of his life is, and must ever remain unknown to us; and in the absence of accredited facts, men have had to make inferences, and the most of these have failed to stand the tests of reflection and time. Was our premier Novelist an habitual 'bulker': a party, that is, who slept on public benches, or butcher's stalls, or the like open air conveniences, among thieves, and buttocks, and beggars, for the sole reason that he had nowhere else to sleep?[1] Did he play Bilkum in fact, and tap a real Stormandra for his share of her fees in the service of a living, breathing Mother Punch-

His work and fame.

[1] Of course, he may have bulked it once and again for fun. I myself . . . But who has not?

bowl? Was he used to blow a trumpet at a booth in Bartlemy Fair? All these villainies were laid to his charge (for a frantic Scotchman is no respecter of God, or Man, or History), and all are demonstrably false. Smollett (the aforesaid frantic Scotchman), who wrote of him in his lifetime, wrote in so violent a passion that, his humour being for the moment in abeyance, he could not see that, in dealing as he did with a superior, he was simply revealing himself for a person sick with envy and vanity; and Richardson, who also wrote of him in his lifetime, wrote also as a megalomaniac, and with a feminine acidity in his madness, a sort of elderly-maiden-lady ruffianism in intention and effect, which admirers of *Clarissa* are at some pains to dissemble. There are glimpses of him in his cousin, the Lady Mary Montagu, and these, if they be kindly on the whole, are on the whole contemptuous;[1] there are others in Horace

[1] *Cf.* her taunt that he was capable of 'sharing a rapture with his maid.' Mr. Saintsbury's comment on this takes the shape of a quotation :—'Which many has.' 'Tis but three words long; yet is it long enough. Her Ladyship, by the way, had a mortal contempt for Mr. Pope, the poet; but she nowhere goes so far as to reproach him with his capacity for 'sharing a rapture' with a tainted harlot. (See *post*, pp.

Walpole, that Faddle of genius, whom God and his opportunities made the best letter-writer in Eighteenth-Century England; there is one magnificent reference, as it were a leaf from Apollo's laurel bough, in Gibbon. Comes Arthur Murphy, the Editor of the first collected Edition (1764), an excellent creature, but one not well acquainted with Fielding's life, nor able, had he been so acquainted, Mr. Boswell's inimitable performance being still undone, to make use of his knowledge to any particular advantage; comes Sir Walter, who writes as your right Scot will, and frankly prefers his countryman above the 'Englisher,' though in the long-run, being Sir Walter, he is constrained to write Fielding down 'the Father of the English Novel'; comes Thackeray with that achievement in portraiture of his, a piece of work delightful as literature but wholly disloyal to letters; come Lawrence and Keightley, who want to learn whatever may be learned, and in their need go far to redeem our world from the reproach of knowing nothing of one of its

39-41, my note on Colley Cibber.) But then, you see, Mr. Pope had begun by solemnly, even ardently, making love to her; and, so far as we know, her cousin had not.

greatest men; comes Sir Leslie Stephen, 'a good man, good at many things,' who knows and loves his Fielding, and says the wisest and the most affectionate things of him, yet cannot refrain from making comparisons, and finding resemblances, between Fielding, the immitigable Ironist, and Thackeray, the unmitigated Sentimentalist, which make you wonder how and why in the world he contrives to be so affectionate and so wise as he is. Meanwhile the Figure itself remains legendary, vague, obscure. Was there a Lady Bellaston in his life? Who knows? Yet the chances are that there was. Who cares? Did he smoke so furiously that he needed nothing but the wrappings of his tobacco for the manuscript paper of his very solid Five Volumes of *Théâtre*? Was he commonly drunk, always begrimed with snuff, and ever bending the stiles along his path up Parnassus Hill with no better dunnage than a yard of clay and a flask of champagne? Thackeray's charming but (in the circumstances) really rascally discovery of him made strongly for these last conclusions; for Thackeray, you see, knew all about the Eighteenth Century, and was good at Grub

The Figure itself.

Street, and had all but published with Lintot and Cave. So the Middle-Victorian feeling against the Author of *Tom Jones* was strong; so strong that Lord Houghton (himself a man with an idiosyncrasy which demanded privacy) writing of Thackeray dead, could actually refer to him as 'Fielding without the manners' dross.'[1] It sounds incredible; yet so it is. And, for my part, I cannot be emphatic enough in my praise of them that have done what they could to discredit this affecting perversion of life, and character, and fact. Mr. Saintsbury, for one, has brushed it aside: not without a twinge of conscience, I imagine, as becomes a *fervent* of Thackeray; but critically and finally.[2] Still, the first great effort to

[1] So, too, Miss Brontë: who compared him to a vulture (the 'eagle' of her antithesis being W. M. T.), talked of his taste for carrion, and professed to discern terrific potentialities for mischief and illiberality (especially in his contemplation of his female friends) in the shape of his lower jaw. It is pretty evident that the impassioned spinster knew nothing of what she was talking about; but it is also pretty evident that she followed the trend of her time. On the whole one is not sorry that her 'eagle' found her dull, and escaped her society for the Garrick, as soon as ever (with an approach to politeness) he could.

[2] Mr. Saintsbury is nearly always correct about Fielding. A whiff, for instance, and he disposes, once and for ever, of what Sir Walter (who is quite prepared to believe it of Fielding, by the way: though I think he would have stiffened his

redeem our Fielding from the reproach affixed upon him by the inheritor of his province in art, his genius, his cynicism, and the rest—('his wit, his humour, his pathos, and his umbrella')—was Mr. Austin Dobson, in that excellent monograph which he contributed to the 'English Men of Letters' Series (1883). I may think Mr. Dobson is rather more apologetical than he needs to be: that, in dealing with this great man apart from his works, he also is somewhat Middle-Victorian in mood and effect. But his is a brave book, all the same: and none can read it without learning as much of Fielding as will probably be known this side Doomsday. Many may write, and many will write (as I hope), about this Man among Men of ours; but howsoever many they be, there is none but will owe a great deal to the good Poet and fine Scholar to whom 'tis due.

Mr. Dobson's monograph.

back and bronzed his brow against it, had it been told of Smollett) rightly terms that 'humiliating anecdote,' which is related by Horace Walpole on the authority of such political and social scum as Rigby and Peter Bathhurst: I mean the story of Fielding at supper, in company with a dirty cloth, a ham-bone and a mutton-bone in one dish, a blind man, a whore, and three Irishmen. A touch of Mr. Saintsbury's finger; and 'tis seen to be, while good enough Horace Walpole, entirely incredible history.

I

IT was long the fashion: a fashion to which Gibbon gave the weight of his serene assurance and immense authority: to treat the Feildings[1] as descended from a Hapsburg. This fashion is now discredited; but there is no doubt that the greatest of them sprang from an ancient and gallant stock, and came from forebears distinguished in English life and history. I am not concerned with the passage of the Feildings through the years. It is enough to begin with Sir William, created Earl of Denbigh, who married Susan Villiers, sister to George, First Duke of Buckingham; died for his King in Rupert's rush on Birmingham; and left behind him two sons, Basil and George. The first of these, a vigorous yet independent Roundhead, married wisely and variously,[2] lived to a great age, and dying without issue, passed on the Earldom of Denbigh to William, his

Fielding's descent.

[1] So the name is still spelled, I believe, by the Denbighs—the ruling branch. Fielding's retort upon a Denbigh, who asked why he wrote his name with the 'i' before the 'e'—(that he supposed it was because his branch was the first that learned to spell)—leaves the question exactly where it was.

[2] Either he was, or he might have been, responsible for no less than four several Countesses of Denbigh.

nephew, second son of his brother George. This same George was raised to the Irish Peerage as Viscount Callan, 'with succession to the Earldom of Desmond'; and his fifth son, John, who entered the Church, and became Canon of Salisbury, and Chaplain to William III., took to wife Bridget, daughter of Scipio Cokain, of Somersetshire, by whom he had issue three sons and three daughters. His third son, Edmund, followed the wars, served with distinction under Marlborough, and made a match, whether runaway or not remains obscure, with Sarah, daughter of Sir Henry Gould, Knight, of Sharpham Park, Somerset, a Judge of the King's Bench. And at Sharpham Park, on the 22nd April 1707, there was born to these two that Harry Fielding who is known to us as the Father of the English Novel, or (as Byron put it) 'the prose Homer of human nature.'[1]

His father.

Edmund Fielding may, or may not, have been what his contemporaries would have called 'a queer bitch.' Inasmuch as he fought well under Marlborough, as I have said, and died a Major-General, the chances

[1] A niece of Dr. John's, the Lady Mary Pierrepont, was afterwards the renowned Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. In effect, she was Harry Fielding's second cousin.

are that he was not exactly *that*. But there is a suspicion that he was by way of being something in that line; for in 1706 his father-in-law bequeathed to Harry Fielding's mother a fortune of £3000—(to be invested either in the 'purchase of a Church or Colledge lease, or of lands of Inheritance')—for her sole use, he (Edmund) having 'nothing to doe with it.' Sir Henry knew his namesake and grandson, for he did not die till 1710; when Edmund and his wife removed from Sharpham Park to a house in East Stour (or Stower) in Dorsetshire. There other children were born to them, notably Sarah, author of *David Simple* and a valued correspondent of the celebrated Mr. Richardson,[1] and there in 1780, when Harry was somewhere about eleven years old, his mother died. That is all that is known. Whether Edmund Fielding did, or did not, stay on in the pleasant house at East Stour none living can tell; and they that bet on the event do so in an utter lack of information. But, speaking with perfect caution—(that is to say, with the voice of Mr. Austin Dobson)—'it is clear that the

[1] Who insulted her in her brother, the victorious author of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, as only an underbred, agitated, offended citling could.

[illegible] part of Harry Fielding's childhood must have been spent "by the banks of sweetly-winding Stour" [illegible] to which he subsequently refers in *Tom Jones*. Also, it is recorded that his education at this time was the work of the Rev. Mr. Oliver; presumably the clergyman of Motcombe, a neighbouring village. According to Murphy, Oliver sat for Parson Trulliber; but I had rather think that on this point, as on others, Murphy was mistaken. 'Tis to be noted (for one thing) that Harry Fielding, while something of a pedant, was an excellent classical scholar. I cannot believe that he learned to become one at Eton. I make bold to conclude that, whoever it was that took on the brilliant, apprehensive, inquiring youngster, he could not choose but do his best with the material at his hand. Now, if Oliver were the Trulliber whose sole concern was pigs and pig's-wash, then one of two things is certain: either Fielding, the most generous and the most upright of men and writers, very horribly maligned him; or Trulliber (pig-dealer and pork-butcher; sow-gelder *à ses heures*) was not Oliver; and Arthur Murphy, meaning quite handsomely by all parties, as is the manner of his kind, here

said the thing which was not, and so did mischief now past repair.

Well grounded, however: whether by Trulliber-Oliver or by another: in due course Fielding went to Eton. Here he remained for certain years, no 'Colleger' (one harboured within) but an 'Oppidan' (a scholar boarded in the town); here, 'with true *Spartan* fortitude,' as he remarks, he sometimes sacrificed at that 'birchen altar' dear so long to the High-Priests of Science; here he met his fast friends, George Lyttelton, Winnington, and Charles Hanbury (afterwards Hanbury Williams), and had for his contemporaries Henry Fox, and William Pitt (Pitt, the Great Commoner; Pitt the sublime Lord Chatham!), with, it may be, Gilbert West, who translated Pindar, and little Tommy Arne, who was afterwards to write the music of *Artaxerxes* and *Rule Britannia*, and many a classic in English song besides; and here, in the noble, if ambiguous, speech of the illustrious Mr. Gray (himself an Etonian, of a somewhat later date), he 'chased the rolling circle's speed' and 'urged the flying ball' with all the energy that

At Eton.

> Buxom health of rosy hue,
> Wild wit, invention ever new,
> And lively cheer of vigour born,

could give. I know not (nobody does) the date of his reception;[1] but I have had several lads of genius through my hands, and I make bold to say that here came his Choice of Hercules, and that that choice was hardly one which would commend itself to Minerva. There is nothing to guide one, nothing to illuminate, nothing to suggest. But women are women; such boys as the boy Fielding, seld-seen or not, are ever occurring; and Fielding's mind was in the main an experimenting, an observing, a debating mind. Is Molly Seagrim Mr. Jones's first? If she be, then assuredly, I take it, there is not near so much likeness between Jones and Fielding as has hitherto been perceived. In Fielding's life and work, the Accidental Woman takes her place, and gets her due. That is one of the many things which mark him off from other English novelists. Of itself, the point is unimportant. Boyhood counts for little or nothing in the development of sentimental Man, and Youth for very little more. It is only when Manhood lays hold upon a boy that Woman begins to count: till then she is but a sensation and a jest. But to be a

[1] Mr. Dobson conjectures that he was entered soon after his mother's death.

Man is to be conscious of a heart; and with, and in, that consciousness your rakish Youngster becomes a decent Male, and (forgetting his experiences) looks round for Somebody with whom to fall in love. That, as I think, was Fielding's case; as it has been the case of many millions of lusty lads besides. To put things plainly, I think that he had learned his grammar thoroughly before he went to Eton; and I am fully prepared to meet him when, on his departure thence, he falls over head and ears in love with Miss Sarah Andrew.

A boyish romance.

She was a 'fortune and a beauty,' as they said in those days; she lived at Lyme Regis; she was a lonely, lovely orphan; one Andrew Tucker was her guardian. It was so desperate a business while it lasted that, though the lover was but eighteen or so, (but, like the abducting Rochester before him, he cannot but have been an uncommonly handsome and brilliant boy), the Young Lady herself was sent away out of his reach; while the Young Lady's Guardian was moved to protest (in an affidavit) that he went in fear of his life on account of young Mr. Fielding and his man, which latter 'he feared would beat, maim, or kill

him.' Is young Mr. Fielding's man a far-away vision of Black George? I love to think so; but evidence, much less proof, is wanting. What is certain is that Miss Andrew, having been deposited for safety with another Guardian, one Rhodes of Modbury, in South Devon, was presently married off out of harm's way to one of Rhodes's sons; had several children; and was afterwards honoured among the Tuckers and the Rhodeses as the original of Sophia Western. Of course, she was nothing of the sort; for, as we all know, Fielding was at some pains to make it history that, in essentials and particulars alike, Sophia Western was none other than his first wife, Charlotte Cradock. But it is scarce possible to doubt that Mrs. Rhodes, who, at the time of affidaviting, was a damsel of fifteen (she died in 1783, being then some three and seventy years old), shared, if she did not encourage, the delusion; for it is a fact that Woman, whatever her age, and whatever her fashion, dearly loves being written about in books, and that Ronsard's lovely sonnet—

> 'Quand vous serez bien vieille, au soir, à la chandelle'—

enshrines and glorifies an eternal truth. I do not for a moment think that, however romantical the Fielding of Lyme Regis, he knew thus much: and I am equally sure that the lady did not. But by the time that *Tom Jones* appeared, both he and she were wiser. Both were some thirty years older; but the woman was by that much the worse for life, while the man, his eye on immortality, had so far learned his lesson that Miss Andrew was at best a pleasant memory, and he was conscious of nothing vitally glorious in the past except the girl he had married; loved to distraction; honoured with motherhood; spree'd with; starved with; betrayed (it may be; I know not); and seen die.

Its consequences.

Meanwhile he had done enough. A lad of eighteen, he had been foiled in a fine, scandalous attempt at abduction; he had seen a fortune and a beauty violently removed from his neighbourhood, and married out of hand with a view to making him impossible; and he had been bound over to keep the peace by an elderly gentleman, who went in bodily fear of young Mr. Fielding and his follower. He rose to the situation (or Edmund Fielding rose for

him); and, instead of going to Oxford or Cambridge, as in the ordinary course of things he would have done, he went to Leyden to read law under 'the learned Vitriarius.' Also, he 'took it out of' Miss Andrew by translating a part of Juvenal's Sixth Satire 'in English Burlesque Verse,' in the manner of Mr. Butler's *Hudibras*. It will be owned, I think, that this was not the revenge of a desperate man.[1]

II

Student at Leyden.

NOBODY knows how long Fielding remained under the wing of the learned Vitriarius, nor, when the learned Vitriarius was doing something else than lecture, exactly

[1] Austin Dobson: *Fielding* (New York), Appendix I. It was Keightley who unearthed old Tucker's affidavit. It was sworn the 14th of November 1725, before John Bowdidge, Mayor of Lyme Regis; with the result that Henry Fielding, Gent, and his 'servant or companion, Joseph Lewis,' were bound over to keep the peace, insomuch as the said 'Andrew Tucker, Gent, one of the Corporation,' was 'in fear of his life of some bodily hurt to be done or to be procured to be done to him by H. Fielding and his man.' Further: it was a Tucker tradition that Andrew of that ilk considered himself hardly used by Rhodes of Modbury, for the reason that, all the while he was going in fear of his life, etc., he was resolving that Miss Andrew should marry his own son. One Davidson, a Devon antiquary, is responsible (under an 'it is said') for

how he employed himself. It is said, however, that he worked hard at the 'civilians'; and it is history that he had his eye upon the drama, and brought back with him the first draft of his *Don Quixote in England*.[1] It is plain that, if any Dutch maiden attracted him, the affair was attended by no memories, whether humorous or tragic, nor issued in any more translations from the Roman Satirists; and it is also plain that neither the country nor the people made any sort of impression on him; for I recall but a single reference to either in his after-work.[2] I suppose, with others, that when he did return to England, he returned because he could not count on ready money from his father—(who had married a second

the statement that Fielding (his 'companion or servant,' no doubt, aiding and abetting) 'made a desperate attempt to carry the lady off by force on a Sunday, when she was on her way to Church.' Last of all, as Miss Andrew's mother and the mother of Sarah Gould were in some sort connected, the Chloe and Strephon of this highly romantic business appear to have been a kind of cousins. Why in the *Théâtre* of Henry Fielding is there no comedy called *The Rival Guardians*?

[1] As his formal comedy, *Love in Several Masques*, was played while he was yet in his twentieth year, it seems highly probable that it also was at least begun at Leyden.

[2] I forget for the moment where it occurs. But the inspiration of it is merely the stenches of a Dutch canal.

time, and was begetting a second family with all the lustiness of a British soldier) —and was unable to pay his lodgings and his fees. At any rate, return he did; and, being by this time a handsome, vigorous, inspiring creature, over six feet high, shaped (the inference is) like one of his own heroes, dark-haired and dark-eyed, with a presence, and a temperament, and a tongue, he plunged, and plunged again, and yet again plunged into the roaring, rioting pool of early Georgian London. His nominal income was one of £200 a year; but it came from his father, and, as he himself remarked of it, anybody might pay it that would: so that, men and women being what they are, and have always been, I see no reason to doubt that he knew Lady Bellaston at first-hand, and, on occasion, was no more carefully concerned to reject the favours of Miss Matthews than was Lieutenant Booth. I may be slandering him; but I do not think that he himself would have either said or thought so, and I am sure that Balzac, whom he anticipated at more than one point, and in whose theory of Fiction as a right expression of Life the Woman who gives, and the Man who takes, are essential elements, would, had he been

His return to London.

consulted, have explained (at great length) that human intercourse is largely conducted on these lines;[1] and if M. de Fielding had not, on occasion, vied with MM. Henri de Marsay, and Lucien de Rubempré, and Maxime de Trailles, and the rest of those brilliant blackguards which we know, he would have been at best the 'good buffalo' of Taine's report. Of course, Fielding was no more La Palférine, nor Nathan, nor de Marsay, than he was the 'good buffalo'; and, of course, we cannot get behind that much of his autobiography which he chose

[1] In point of fact, the outcry against Mr. Jones's acceptance of money from Lady Bellaston, 'for value received,' is largely, if not wholly, an effect of cant. Such connexions, such fine confusions of beatitude and gratitude, have existed at least since Woman began to assert herself as Man's complement and equal; nor, if you clear your mind of Puritan hysteria, and think it out, is there any reason, especially if you consider the practice of the whole civilised world, during many hundreds of years: Puritanism (or, better still, the Prudery which is the worst and most mischievous effect of Puritanism) always excepted: why there should be. This apart, however: it is certain that such connexions are common yet in all civilised polities; and it is shrewdly suspected that, even in England, their morality and convenience are found immensely less unnatural in fact than they are in fiction: so that a real Jones were not nearly so much to blame for taking real money in an inkhorn, real life from a real Lady Bellaston, as he is in taking money from Lady Bellaston, as the mere hero of a novel.

to publish in his novels. But it is evident that one of his merits is his hold on Character and Life: especially upon Life and Character as they are shaped and determined by the uses and the circumstances of Society. Men and women, as I have said, and as everybody knows, are pretty much now what they were then; as then they were pretty much what they have always been. And I no more doubt that the Matthews and Bellaston episodes were profitable to Fielding: profitable and deemed in no sort reprehensible: than I doubt that their author wrote the *Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*, every sentence in which is stamped the utterance of a humane, stately, and honourable gentleman.

Hackney-writer or hackney-coachman?

Be this as it may, 'young ravens must have food'; and if this particular young raven differed from others, his brethren, at this point, it was that, having far larger appetites than they, he needed a fuller choice and a steadier supply of victuals. As he could get nothing from his father, and was therefore debarred that study of the Law to which, as his grandsire's namesake and firstborn grandson, he was perhaps devoted from his birth, he presently found

himself face to face with an 'extensive and peculiar' difficulty. Should he turn hackney-writer? Should he turn hackney-coachman? So he says himself; and, however considerable his gift with cattle may have been, I take it none can wonder that he took to persuading men and women rather than to driving hacks. In truth, there was no choice for him. Even in Grub Street the literary calling was not without its genteel elements. The loosest and arrantest of them that 'wrote for the booksellers'; the men who sold their shirts for tripe and gin, and cut themselves armholes in a blanket, or a sack, to shelter them while they rapped out translations from Xenophon or Tacitus, or wasted their ink in speculation as to the economic future of the Realm, or in essays on *The Effect of the Precious Metals on the Conduct and Conscience of Mankind*: even these wretches, I say, could call themselves scholars and gentlemen, and, if they pawned, and starved, and cadged, and potted, could always do so on the argument that their profession was honourable, and that they themselves, however unfortunate, yet chiefly suffered by reason of the dull and stupid self-esteem of the Mobility, for which they wrote,

and the rapacity of the Bookseller, whose business it was to keep the Mobility going in the matter of Polite Letters, and to pay his furnishers as little as he might, at the same time that he extorted from them every scrap of 'copy' which their famished intellectuals would yield. Plainly, Fielding had no choice: he must turn to literature, or perish. So to literature he turned. And, being young, and therefore foolish; being ignorant, and therefore unwise; having nothing to the purpose but high spirits, a bowing acquaintance with certain languages, and a versatile and clever turn for imitation; he did as all the adventurous youngsters have done who ever attempted Letters, and took to writing for the Stage.

III

The Stage.

'TWAS a courageous thing to do: and it might, had he been such an *homme du théâtre* as Dumas was afterwards: Dumas, or even Sheridan; to say nothing of Vanbrugh and Wycherley before: it might, I say, have taken him to fame and fortune. But, for one thing, he was far too young for anything but apprenticeship to this most

difficult of trades; and, for another, he had few touches of the Stage in him, and neither saw its true inwardness nor divined the means which heaven-born dramatists use to secure their ends. To him, in the beginning at all events; to him, as I see him in these years; a play was a form of literature in five divisions, called Acts. It was written in dialogue; and in writing it, therefore, you might be as facetious, or as irrelevant, or as pointed as you liked, since in these modes of composition, you were, or you thought you were, presenting Character. Then, having presented character through some three or four Acts: in the course of which you suggested a couple of adulteries, and brangled together as many absurd and futile intrigues as your scheme would comprehend, on the pretext, and with the idea, that you were painting Manners; you made, in your Fifth Act, a kind of *amende honorable* to your persecuted Hero. And Mrs. Takewell went to the right hand, and Mrs. Shakewell to the left hand; and the hideous old guardian, Justice Gripewell, was confounded and bamboozled; and Filchwell (the valet) brought in a box of deeds; and Pinchwell (the chamber-maid) volunteered a con-

fession; and Mr. Valentine and the lovely and blushing, but not too innocent, Aurelia were made happy for life. A caricature? Why not? Caricature or not, I cannot see that, in the matter of Formal Comedy, Fielding, though he did other things on other lines, ever got beyond the Theory of Drama herein contained and expressed. Indeed, he took that theory very seriously; did his best to live up to it; and sometimes succeeded, more or less, in his endeavour. But in the end, the thing about him to be got from his plays is that, if he were (as he was) the very Genius of the Novel, that terrible entity the *homme du théâtre*, whose absence has wrecked so many ambitions, was not included in his magnificent and various endowment.

The Taste of the Town.

When, at twenty, he produced his *Love in Several Masques*, the Gods of Comedy were dead, and the Town was running mad on that entertaining bastard, *The Beggar's Opera*. Congreve and Wycherley were ancient history. Farquhar's last and best comedy, *The Beaux' Stratagem*, had been produced by Mr. Wilks in 1707, the year of our neophyte's birth. Even Cibber—(the popular Actor-Manager-Author: as who

should say the Georgian or Early-English Dion Boucicault; the Cibber of Mawworm and Dr. Cantwell, of Sir Novelty Fashion and Sir Charles Easy)—was himself a kind of relic, or antiquity. Vanbrugh, our most humorous, most vivid, most generous and abundant stage-humourist since Fletcher, was newly dead, and his posthumous *Journey to London*—'faked,' perverted, finished, by 'Old King Coll'—had, as *The Provok'd Husband*, given the thrice-admirable Mrs. Oldfield one of her last and greatest opportunities (1727). But his best play, *The Provok'd Wife*, dated from 1697, while his *Relapse*, a master's descant on certain trifling themes set forth in Cibber's *Love's Last Shift*: his *Relapse*, with Hoyden and Foppington, with Berinthia, and Sir Tunbelly Clumsey, and the Nurse: was but a year younger; and his *Confederacy*, that inoubliable reminder that the Comic Muse is naturally no better than she should be, dated as far back as 1705. Of course the good men were about, and in the air. Wycherley, I take it, had passed: 'twas a big, lusty English brute, with a rare sense of the Stage, and a *vis comica* never so well shown as in his grossest offences against accepted morals,—

such as they were. But there was always Congreve, the boldest, the wittiest, the most deliberately literary of them all: Congreve, so truly the heir of Jonson that his diversions, his asides, his accidents, his incidental scenes, his studies in humour, his English, remain incomparable to this day. There was Farquhar, a kind of prose Fletcher, with his velleities of romance, his dissolute, kindly humour, his mastery of a certain sort of character, his turn for telling speech, his unalterable disposition to see everything in the rosiest, the most sparkish, the most gallant light. Last of all there was Sir John Vanbrugh; and I think that in Sir John, young Harry Fielding might very well have found that he wanted. For our Man among Men was not at all romantically given: he cared nothing for that sort of gay and adventurous, yet poignant, contrast of character and event, which Farquhar set forth in *The Inconstant*, and *The Twin-Rivals*; so Farquhar was not for him. As for Congreve, well—! 'Il ne fait pas ce tour qui veut.' In such matters as expression and invention, is not even Sheridan's a poor reflected glory beside Congreve's? And *The School for Scandal*, however gallantly

it go, does it contrast effectually with *The Way of the World* and *Love for Love*? And how should this masterly and vigorous, yet rare and exquisite, craftsman attract your 'prentice-hand in any but the worst sense and to the fondest end? In fact the sole and only model left to Fielding was Vanbrugh; and he, with all his deep and all his surface qualities, was every whit as hopeless an exemplar as the rest; inasmuch as in his composition there was intensely and especially included that aforesaid *homme du théâtre*, an appreciable strain of whom had somehow been omitted from Fielding's.

Vanbrugh and Fielding.

The two men had much in common; but their effects are never so far apart, their results exhibit never so glaring a discrepancy, as when each is drawing on their common heritage. As regards Morality, for instance: both are lewd in fancy, abrupt in treatment, coarse in intention and effect. But Vanbrugh's lewdness is amusing, Fielding's is dull; Vanbrugh's method is brilliant and exhilarating, Fielding's is seldom either one or other; Vanbrugh's effects, his *jeux de scène*, his processes and conclusions, are essentially dramatic, while Fielding's—well,

are they for the most part worth a thought?[1] A better way to mark the essential difference between the two is to consider them in their several methods of treating Character, and to this end I will take each man in his peculiar province: Vanbrugh on the Stage, Fielding in the Novel. And taking them thus, I stop on the one hand at Sir John Brute, on the other at Squire Western. No contrast could be more instructive. The Novelist literally plays with Western: he knows him ever so intimately, yet his introduction of him seems almost careless; he shows him a tyrant and a ruffian and a sot; yet he has ever a kindly, and at the same time a leisurely, half-laughing, half-reticent mastery of his creation, which he

[1] As Fielding's, yes, a thousand times. As stage-stuff, no. I except the Burlesques: *Tom Thumb the Great* and *The Covent Garden Tragedy*. Both are masterpieces; but in both the interest is largely literary and pedantic; it has but a kind of rotting acquaintance with human nature; the Poet-in-Charge is rather gibing and japing a certain mode of literary activity, and therewith a select few among his literary brethren, than doing anything for English Comedy. In other words, the Drama of Dryden, Wycherley, Congreve, Farquhar, Vanbrugh, Hoadley, Cibber (even), Sheridan, is in divers ways and degrees an expression of Life. Fielding's Burlesques, which are the best of his *Théâtre*, are but a criticism of one side, one aspect, one ambition of a particular expression of Art.

never permits to get out of hand; so that he is able, on occasion, to assert, and to make us assent to, such an outrageous familiarity as that of the boxing of Squire Western's ears, by a person unnamed, whose sole title to credence is that, being an officer and a gentleman, he is as well acquainted with Squire Western as Squire Western's creator.[1] Now, with Western contrast that other most excellent study in Georgian English; I mean Sir John Brute. No purpose would be served by disarticulating or anatomising the Somersetshire squire and the London mohock. My concern is with methods; and I ask you to note how, while Fielding's Western is always presenting himself, yet is not once fully presented, so that, to get a complete impression of him you have to take the *History of a Foundling* first and last: in *The Provok'd Wife* Vanbrugh presents his Brute from the beginning in such terms

[1] That is to say, a great deal better than Sir Walter Scott and Mr. Saintsbury. Sir Walter thought that Mr. Western ought to have retaliated; Mr. Saintsbury (speaking, he says, as a Tory) agrees, and seems to think this inimitable and daring touch the Novelist's 'one slip.' For myself, I am, like Mr. Dobson, of Mr. Fielding's party: for the reason that he knew his Western, and that his Western, if we are to accept him at all, must be accepted on his terms.

that misunderstanding is impossible.[1] The character, that is to say, leaps instantly into life and energy and colour, complete as Pallas springing from the brows of Zeus. A dramatist, a Comic Poet, has passed, and after that first speech of Sir John's, you could swear to your Brute among ten thousand.

Novel and Play.

I will not do Fielding such an injustice as to compare anything in his plays and this masterpiece of dramatic presentation. But let us go a little further: let us compare the Novelist and the Comic Poet; let us take the immortal scenes between Western and his Sister and the scene in which Sir John and Constant begin to tell each other what they must about my Lady. These scenes are the true apotheosis of the Western family: the Squire and his Sister are handled with an understanding, an adroitness, a mastery alike of male brutality and female imbecility, a command of English as it ought never to be spoken except in novels, which make them one of the best good things in letters; and you take them to yourself, with

[1] *The Provok'd Wife*, Act I. Scene 1. *A room in Sir John Brute's house. Enter* SIR JOHN BRUTE. SIR JOHN. 'What cloying meat is love, when matrimony is the sauce to it,' etc.

the reflection that this is how the good man, sure of his method and master of his material, *does*. Does, that is, when he is writing a novel. But how if the same good man set out to write a play? And how would this gem of fiction sparkle on the boards? The answer is instant and unqualified: it would not sparkle at all. It could not: not even though, at a given point, the Squire should 'suit the action to the word,' and thereby make himself a shrined Saint for all the Naturalists in Time. Now, Sir John Brute is a frank and violent blackguard; he is also a villainous drunkard; he is (further) a rake of the dirtiest habit; and he hates, insults, and despises his wife, as lively a person as Vanbrugh can make her, for the sole reason that she is his wife. She, My Lady, is pursued (much to her contentment) by one Constant; and in the end comes one of the completest scenes in English Comedy. Constant and Lady Brute, supported by Heartfree, Constant's friend, and Belinda, Sir John's niece, are taking tea, and talking agreeable treason. *Alarum. Excursions.* The two gentlemen are dissembled in my Lady's closet; and to my Lady and Belinda enters Sir John—(who has been beating and

despoiling citizens, and has passed the night in a cell, and is fresh from the hands of a scandalised Justice and an astonished Constable)—as drunk, as filthy, as cynical and detestable as a man may be. At a wink from the Comic Spirit, Sir John, insisting on 'some of your cold tea, Wife,' breaks open the closet, and Messrs. Heartfree and Constant emerge. Sir John is magnificent: drunk as he is, he rises to the situation, and is magnificent. But, says Constant in effect, after giving a lucid yet inexpressibly futile explanation of things: 'If you don't choose to believe all this, Sir, why, then, I wear a sword'; and so departs with Heartfree, leaving Lady Brute and Belinda to face the storm. To these Sir John: wickedly drunk, yet with a fine eye for facts, and the strongest sense imaginable of his own position, as determined by the other man's announcement that he wears a sword: to these, and to himself, Sir John:—'Wear a sword, Sir? And what of all that, Sir?' . . . I dare quote no further. But he that runs may read; and he that doth so read may, having first of all rejoiced in Miss Western and the Squire, as being among the best the English Novel contains, go search me all the plays that Fielding

wrote for a speech that on the stage would mean one-fortieth so much, or a part that would play one-fortieth so well. The conclusion is inevitable. Fielding's Rambles and Veromils, his Sotmores and his Millamours, his Guzzles and Rufflers, his Positive Traps, and Bellamants, and the rest, are stuff ground out for the Stage to keep some actors in parts and a certain 'young raven' we know of in mutton and champagne; while Vanbrugh's Sir John is stuff done for the Stage for the very simple reason that it could not possibly, any more than *Othello* and *Hamlet* could, be done for anything else.

Comedy, Farce, and Translation.

I shall not attempt to analyse the several essays in Formal Comedy, Farce, Translation, Burlesque, and Political Satire which Fielding, between *Love in Several Masques* (1727), which was exalted by Oldfield, Wilks, and Cibber, and *The Wedding Day* (1743), which not even Garrick and Woffington and Macklin could keep from sinking. With this last (there was a posthumous play, called *The Fathers: or The Good-Natured Man*) his varied, picturesque, and in some ways interesting career as a writer for the theatres came to a rather poor full close. He is said to have remarked that he left off play-writing

at the moment when he ought to have been beginning to write plays. But, for my part, while I am prepared to admit that, if he did speak to this purpose, there was much truth in what he said, I am very glad, for the sake of the English Novel, that he discovered his mistake too late to profit by it. Mr. Dobson has said all there is to say about his five-and-twenty essays in play-writing, and, in denoting *Pasquin*, and *The Author's Farce*, and the Burlesques for special commendation, has left me and the others nothing particular to say. For the Burlesques, they are, as I think, unapproachable. In a sense they are echoes; but they are echoes so vocal and so plangent, so wanton and so vigorous, as altogether to drown the Voices that set them calling.[1] For

The Burlesques.

[1] One, *The Covent Garden Tragedy* (1732), a travesty of Ambrose Philips and Racine, is altogether too naughty and too riotous to be included in any list of *Masterpieces of the English Drama* which an honest critic might essay to eternise. Yet a masterpiece it is; and the Author was a young fellow of five-and-twenty. The other, *Tom Thumb the Great*, though something more pedantic, is even better fun. It was written when Fielding was twenty-three; according to Mrs. Pilkington it forced from Swift one of the two laughs of his life; it had a run of many nights, the last scene being invariably encored; in a redaction (with songs) by Kane O'Hara, it held the stage for years. Liston was magnificent as Lord Grizzle; and 'James,' said Walter Scott to the elder Ballantyne, on a day in the Year of Grace 1814—'James,' he said, 'I'll tell you

the Ballad-Farces, and some of the Formal Comedies, there is this to add: that Fielding knew his London, and in them made as good and profitable an use of it as lay in him to make. Of the Satires, I will but note that they filled his pockets, and—incidentally, at least—suggested to Sir Robert Walpole the creation of that Dramatic Censorship by which, in the person of the Licenser of Plays, the English Stage has ever since his time been throttled. The adaptations from Molière, *The Mock Doctor* (1732) and *The Miser* (1733), are well done; and what is more, perhaps, they served to increase the reputation of the Miss Catharine Raftor afterwards famous as Mrs. Clive.[1] The latter was a favourite with 'heavy leads' as late as the late Sam Phelps.

The Satires.

But, the Burlesques apart, Fielding's *Théâtre*, while it displays the Author as a

His failure on the Stage.

what Byron should say to me, when we are about to accost each other: "Art thou the man whom men famed Grizzle call?" And then how germane would be my answer: "Art thou the still more famed Tom Thumb the Small?"' The quotations are not so much from Fielding as from Kane O'Hara. But certain men of admirable genius—Fielding, Byron, Scott—take hands in them, and I give them for all that means.

[1] I know not if Fielding discovered this remarkable woman. But, if he did not, he did so much for her, having seen her once, that he may fairly be said to have created her.

dramatic adventurer of uncommon energy, industry, and versatility, is none the less essentially *oubliable*. I have read it several times; and every time it has been new to me. New, and dull. I can remember Lord Ogleby and Dr. Cantwell; I have not forgotten Mrs. Centlivre; I have, to put my case on higher ground, a good running interest in *The Squire of Alsatia* and *The Suspicious Husband*. But Fielding's heroes and heroines, his rascals and his gulls, his intrigues, his diversions, his attempts at invention, are ever a blank to me: I forget them as I read. And my conclusion is that, while he makes so interesting and respectable a figure as to bulk largely in the history of the English Stage, yet, however timely and enterprising, however *ondoyantes et diverses*, his ambitions were, he left English Drama and the English Stage pretty much as he found them. It is absurd to say that he did not often—(not always; but often)—do his very best. Drunk or sober, Bellastonised or only 'on' with this lady or that, the man was a serious artist in whatever mode of art he sought for distinction. I take it that he could not—positively *could* not—embark upon a five-act comedy without getting interested in his work; and

to be interested is to do one's best; and there is enough honest intellectual effort in *The Temple Beau*, or *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, to furnish forth (say) a dozen *Second Mrs. Tanquerays*. But, in the long run, there is but one thing to say of his protracted and laborious experiment: that he was not the man for the work, and that his *Théâtre* is therefore no place for lovers of the play, as Congreve's is, and Farquhar's, and Vanbrugh's. To be content with it, we must rather regard it as a burrowing-ground for historians, and antiquaries, and all such persons, whether useful or not, as are interested in the manners and the Stage of Georgian London.

IV

How he lived.

THUS much of Fielding's Plays. And Life, meanwhile: Life, which at the worst means old mutton and tobacco and champagne, and at the best is a prolonged occasion for self-respect, a luxury which Fielding never lacked, I take it, for more than a day or two at a time? How did the author of *Tom Thumb* and *The Temple Beau* contrive to 'keep his end up' (as we say), and pay his way? Did he come into money

through his mother, and had he ever a small but regular income, in addition to that £200 a year which 'anybody might pay who would,' to keep him in shin of beef and 'British Burgundy' and 'Freeman's Best,' when champagne and what goes with it were impossible? We do not know. In his position, and with his opportunities,[1] a modern[2] would get an actress to pay his debts and mother his failures, or would simply work as some Miss Matthews: with a wealthy 'friend,' and a strong, but wholly imbecile, ambition to make as much of her sex in drama as (say) Mme. Duse makes of her unique temperament and unrivalled art: would have him work, so that he presently fitted her with a tailor-made part, much as Sardou fits Réjane or Sarah. Fielding, it seems, did neither; though, as I have said, he made all the use he could of the admirable Miss Raftor;[3]—and, being an adventurer of

[1] It is to be noted that, whether he hit or missed, he never lacked a stage, but played whatever he did the moment it was done.

[2] Of course, I mean a modern Frenchman. For who ever heard the like of any Englishman, unless he were the hero of an Eighteenth-Century novel?

[3] Who was, it is told, a woman of so strict a virtue that her fair fame was never so much as touched by a breath of anything that was not demonstrably Slander.

resource and parts, played off the idiosyncrasies of Mrs. Charke (Colley's daughter), and Theophilus Cibber (Colley's son), and Quin, and Macklin, and even Colley himself, as well as ever he could. It is pretty certain that he made money by his experiments in drama: for the very simple reason that, if he had not, he could scarce have lived, and must certainly, if one refuse him his Bellastons and his Matthewses—(as, of course, in the interests of Purity and Art and Victorian-England one does)—have taken for a livelihood to hackney-coaching after all. For my own part, I wish he had left a diary of his assault upon the Stage. He must, I think, have loved the life, while it lasted; for he is nowhere very severe on any of the trade. The exception is Colley Cibber.[1] Fielding

His quarrel with Cibber.

[1] Cibber was certainly a man of parts. As an actor of fops and villains, he seems to have had remarkable merit; his perversion of *Richard the Third* held water for something like a couple of centuries, and was played by Garrick, Kean, Macready, everybody, down to the day when Sir Henry Irving sent it to Limbo for ever; in Vanbrugh's hands his Novelty Fashion became the inimitable Lord Foppington; as Poet-Laureate he was very little worse bestowed, he was not much more ridiculous and ineffectual, than the Austins and the Whiteheads and the Pyes; for such critical portraitures of actors and actresses as are contained in the *Apology*—(a work which Fielding, in the course of his vengeance, was at some pains to show must of necessity be written in English,

soon quarrelled, none knows why, with this debonair and graceless elder, to whom he was civil enough in the time of *Love in Several Masques*; and, for the rest of his days, with that touch of pedantry which

inasmuch as it could not possibly be written in anything else) —are so good, so complete, so convincing that we have to wait for Lamb and Hazlitt at their best to get anything to vie with them, and, even so, we cannot choose but feel, in comparing the antient and the moderns, that, if Hazlitt and Lamb be the better literature, 'tis the old Actor has the finer insight, and that his technical inspiration (so to speak) gets nearer, far nearer, the truth than the fine results, however closely observed or well imagined they be, of these others, *par nobile fratrum*, even though they had Munden and Kean to write about; also, some of Cibber's work for the stage (as *The Careless Husband*) is still fairly readable. But the *Apology* apart, his chief title to fame is that neither Pope nor Fielding could away with him, and that he was not to be discomfited by either. Pope, for instance, was an artist in insults; but he was so venomous a little beast, and his venom was so entirely out of his control, that, Cibber offending him, he entirely ruined *The Dunciad* by substituting Cibber, who was no more a dunce than himself, for 'piddling Tibbald.' For that matter, Tibbald was as little a dunce as Cibber, or as Pope; but he was bookish, he was ever a scholar, he played the mischief with Pope's text of Shakespeare; so that there really were reasons why he should have seemed such a dunce to Pope, and to Pope's friends, that the chief place in *The Dunciad* could be accorded to none but him. Now Theobald had questioned (and worse) Pope's scholarship; but Colley had insisted that an unsound woman was not good diet for a confirmed invalid, a party in stays, however brilliant a writer of couplets that party in stays might be; and this impeachment of his *savoir faire* and his *savoir vivre* went so terribly

distinguished him in more than one relation of life, he never ceased from ruffianing—(a slang word; but it exactly expresses what I mean) the unvenerable progenitor of Theophilus and Mrs. Charke. But, this distinguished Antic being excepted, I do

to his head that, where he had before seen only Theobald, the quiet student, he now saw only Cibber, the old Young Man about Town, who knew so very much more about things as they are than (despite his gallant ambitions) an angry, dwarfed, corseted Poet could know, that Tibbald must come down, and Cibber must go up, and *The Dunciad* must (in effect) be disfeatured and disnatured, all because its author wanted to pose as one who knew the Town, and had been proved an ignoramus by this 'harlotry player.' But the brilliant, warped, too-venturesome Arch-Libeller never (if I may so express myself) got any change out of Colley Cibber; nor, so far as I can see, did Mr. Harry Fielding, either. The truth is, the old Actor was a better Artist in insolence than either. Each of them wrote his worst about him; and he read what they had written with an eye amused, a smiling lip, and a brow of brass. Then, having read, he went out, and meditated. And Pope's repute as a Man About Town was devastated and abolished the moment he laid his hand upon it; and his description of Fielding as a 'broken wit' seems to have been as a wasp upon that gentleman's nose, and to have obliged him to forget himself whenever there was a chance of 'getting one in' on the aged, disreputable, clever, self-sufficing creature, who, absurd as he was, yet knew his *monde*, had a vast deal of tact, had parts as an actor, and some brains as a writer, and might, had he not been the kindly whoreson (there really is no other word for him) he was, have gone out of life exulting in the reflection that he had twitted Pope into making a public fool of himself, and had been for years a thorn in the cushion of Henry Fielding.

not remember that, however passionate and enduring his interest in the Human Comedy, he was ever concerned to any serious purpose with those acts of it which are played by the professional comedian in the behind-the-scenes of a real theatre.

His marriage.

Of vastly greater moment than his quarrel with Cibber was his marriage to Miss Charlotte Cradock, of Old Sarum, which was solemnised in 1735, if not earlier, and which, it is not unfair to assume, made two young people supremely happy. Miss Charlotte was one of three fair sisters, who, though they had some money, were not of the highest and best in Salisbury, and of whom the chaste and elegant Mr. Richardson could find nothing better to say (such was his frenzy against the author of *Joseph Andrews*!) than that they were bastards.[1] The vainglorious and offended Cit advances not the slightest proof of his assertion, which seems, indeed, contrived and stated for the sole purpose of belittling a hated rival. Bastard or not, however, Miss Charlotte

[1] Of course, he knew nothing at all about the slanders; or despite his gout, he might, and probably would, have done a little horse-whipping: not on the elderly printer, who was small and of a chubby habit, but on the persons of some of his more outrageous allies.

was by common consent a beautiful creature, and a creature not less amiable than beautiful; so that Fielding could very well afford to laugh at the little man in Salisbury Court; and assuredly, if he ever thought of Richardson at all, which I take leave to doubt, being of a laughing humour, he did. Certain it is that he was devoted to his wife, and that when she died (as she did apparently in 1743), his passion was so violent that his friends feared for his reason. In any event hers is a name to be honoured while its memory lasts by every lover of English letters: since in her years of courtship she suggested Sophia Western, and in her years of wedlock sat for Amelia; and in this way is primarily responsible for two of the bravest and sweetest ideals in English Fiction.

Murphy's story.

Arthur Murphy tells a story—(but it is demonstrably untrue)—that Mrs. Fielding had a fortune of £1500; and that her husband spent it in three years by keeping open house at East Stour, whither he retired with his bride, and where he set up a carriage, invested a number of servants in costly yellow liveries and generally 'went the pace' to such a purpose that he had pre-

sently to return to London, and betake himself once more to the writing of farces.[1] The truth, as Mr. Dobson sees it, is that Harry Fielding may very well have retired to East Stour on the failure of *The Universal Gallant*. This happened in 1735, the accepted year of his marriage: which, as I have said, may well have been earlier. As he was back in London 'in the first months of 1736,' running 'the little French theatre in the Haymarket,' and 'the Great Mogul's Company of Comedians' (so he described them;

[1] Keightley, who describes this part of Murphy's narrative as 'a mere tissue of error and inconsistency,' points out that the family colours were white and blue; while Sir Leslie Stephen very plausibly suggests that the 'yellow liveries' of Murphy's description were a reminiscence (by a thoroughly muddled mind) of that Beau Fielding (*d.* 1712) who married the Duchess of Cleveland, and also 'hired a coach, and kept two footmen clothed in yellow.' Mr. Dobson, though he does not go so far as Keightley, and opines that there was too much liquor going at 'the old farm by the Stour, with the great locust tree at the back,' which Fielding rented, so that 'the dusky Night,' did all-too often 'ride down the sky' over the 'prostrate forms of Harry Fielding's guests,' yet adduces certain irrefragable reasons in support of Keightley's case. As Mr. Booth is a character in fiction, his testimony is of a piece with what the Soldier said, in the historical case of Bardell *v.* Pickwick. If it were not, if it were real autobiography, then were Murphy only less guilty of 'infamonising' a dead man than the Thackeray who owed so much to his delusions, and did so miserably well with them.

with the further information that they had 'dropped from the Clouds'), and producing *Pasquin*, Murphy's 'three years' of 'entertainments, hounds, and horses' gets so hard a knock that, if we had not all been brought up (as it were) in the strong persuasion that Fielding was a squandering suck-pint, it would, I believe, have been held long since a common lie. Be this as it may, 1736 was the year of *Pasquin*; this was followed by *The Fatal Curiosity* of George Lillo, a dramatist whose work was highly esteemed by the author-manager of the Great Mogul's Company; and this in its turn gave place to *The Historical Register for the Year 1736*. With this last piece Fielding's career as a practical playwright came to an end. Herein and in *Pasquin* he hit out at Walpole and his Government with so quick a fist and so long and vigorous an arm that, to protect himself, the Prime Minister was reduced to laying the matter before the House of Commons. So far as I know, the example of neither *Pasquin* nor the *Register* was adduced in support of the Ministerial case. The offending thing was a satire called *The Golden Rump*, which was never printed, which is described as extremely personal and

indecent, and which Walpole was suspected to have ordered and paid for as the best possible argument in his favour. The great Lord Chesterfield[1] spoke admirably against the Bill; but it was to no purpose. Walpole had the Commons in his pocket; the 'Licensing Act' was passed (June 1737); and despite some trifling backslidings on Fielding's part, he and the Muse of Comedy walked henceforth apart.

V

Admitted of the Middle Temple.

THE Stage, then, being closed to Fielding, he returned to the Law; and in the November of 1737, 'Henricus Fielding de East Stour, in Com. Dorset Ar. filius et hæres apparens Brig: Genlis: Edmundi Fielding,' was admitted of the Middle Temple. For the next years he studied quietly and regularly, it would appear: living on his savings over *Pasquin* and the *Register*, or on what was left of the little fortune brought him by his wife. Murphy pictures him in the act of breaking away—

[1] He was the dedicatee of *Don Quixote in England*; and Mr. Dobson duly and accurately notes that some of his arguments may have been furnished him by the Author of that work.

'Rather drunk than otherwise'—from the company in *The Rose* or *The Green Dragon* to go and read law all the night long; and, if the story be true, I cannot see that, inasmuch as it presupposes a certain strength of will in the hero, it is at all to Fielding's discredit. That it is true of once or twice is possible enough; but that every night of his life he reeled upstairs and sat, with his head in towels, devising of John Doe and Richard Roe, and those other elegant and pleasing fictions which enter so largely into the illustration of the Law, I do not for one moment believe. And I take it that he who does believe it would believe anything. They are few, in fact, that start a new career at thirty; they are still fewer who, putting their old life (in Fielding's case a pretty pleasant and exciting one) behind them, are able to achieve the creation of so full and complete a round of interests as enables—nay, in the end compels—them to prosper in their new way. In Fielding there cannot but have been a great capacity for intellectual effort and enrichment. He was certainly no bibulous and futile wastrel that spent 'some thousands of hours' over *Tom Jones*. That book is the work of a

great and serious Artist; and I hold that the Fielding of these years of study and comparison is different in no single particular from the diligent and apprehensive writer to whom we owe our greatest novel. Lady Mary, and 'Horry' Walpole, and Arthur Murphy after them, and after him the brilliant W. M. T., knew something, and guessed more; but they did not know enough, and they guessed backwards; and none has ever suggested a means of reconciling their 'views' of Fielding with the strength, the majesty, the stately undiminishing serenity of Fielding's four great books. It is fair to conclude that Fielding the Templar was at least as resolute, as patient, as laborious, as Fielding the Artist. Why should he not have been? True, he was young; but true, also, he had married a woman he loved, and she had given him other things to think about than taverns. When their girl-child died, the poor man went near to dying with her: so great was his passion, so unmixed his agony. Booth is an idler; but, the Fates being kind, he loves nothing so much as to be alone with Amelia and her babes. Amelia is accepted as Mrs. Fielding; why, then, should Fielding,

the resolved and careful student, be set down as one incapable of Booth's example? I know not. What I do know is that there is too much of Lady Mary, and Murphy, and Thackeray about this good man's name and fame for *me*; and that, if Mr. Dobson had not already writ his *Life*, I 'd like it written again.

Journalism.

I need not concern myself with his contributions to *The Champion* (1739-45), a *Spectator-Tatler-Rambler* kind of thing, done in conjunction with Ralph:—

> Silence, ye Wolves, while Ralph to Cynthia howls,
> And makes night hideous—Answer him, ye Owls!—

and produced three times a week, for which he wrote *Essays*—vague, apprehensive, moral, mostly rather tedious than not; nor with his *Vernon-iad* (1740), an experiment in the mock-epic; his *Defence of the Duchess of Marlborough* (1742); his *Miss Lucy in Town* (1742), 'a little simple farce.'[1] All these things are journalism, and Fielding, though in a manner of speaking he died writing for the Press, is by this time something better, something vastly more considerable, than the best journalist that ever lived. In

[1] Horace Walpole.

effect, in 1742, this scandalous rake, idler, and tippler, produced his *Joseph Andrews*; and the English Novel, started rather poorly by Nash in *Jack Wilton*,[1] brutified and stultified by the Head of *The English Rogue*, half-visioned, yet never seriously attempted, by Defoe, touched in a pretty futile way by Mrs. Behn—the English Novel, I say, became a living, breathing, working fact.

Joseph Andrews.

The book began as a parody of *Pamela* (1741); it ended as the first English Novel. In *Pamela* Richardson set forth the circumstances of a virginal and very lovely Menial, whose Master, the incredible and indescribably wooden Mr. B., made divers desperate but entirely silly and ineffectual attempts upon her Virtue. Then, in the long run, having baffled his wiles, and beaten off his assaults, she permitted him to marry her; so that she was amply rewarded for being a good girl, and declining to part, unless on terms, with what M. Dumas (*fils*) has called her *capital*. The story of her resistance to the impossible

[1] Euphues, Sidney, Green, Lodge—what are they but romantic futilities? As little in touch with life as Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, and as bad at narrative as any one you please.

Mr. B. and of her final triumph over his vile passion made excellent reading for all sorts of women: fine ladies, blooming virgins, and good plain wives and mothers: then, and would make excellent reading for all sorts and conditions of maid-servants now; though, to be sure, I pity the young woman who should risk her *capital* on Richardson's theory of the Master—('Kinder they than Missuses are,' Policeman X has said; and certainly he is right)—as embodied in the once celebrated Mr. B. To Harry Fielding: who, for one thing, knew the worth of a wench's humour, and for another how the noble Mr. B. should have done by Pamela, and would assuredly have done by Pamela, had he not been the creation of a Vegetarian, who knew nothing of life, and wrote of women only from their own report of themselves:[1] to Harry Fielding, I say, *Pamela* appeared (as in fact it is) so much strained, unhealthy, and unnatural rubbish. That being the case, he began

[1] The worst education possible; since it tells you nothing but what they wish to be known of themselves, at the same time that it makes you acquainted with certain subtleties which, being unconsciously revealed, appear, and probably are, so true that, seen in their light, the veracity of the whole report is made to seem unassailable.

upon a parody: with Pamela's brother, Joseph, being wooed to his undoing by the sister of Mr. B., whose Footman he is, even as the obstinate Pamela is Mr. B.'s Maid. Now, Pamela is in love with Mr. B.: which makes her resolution all the nobler in fact and all the more romantical in design. But Joseph is in love with somebody else; so that Mr. B.'s Sister, though she plays the game a vast deal better than her idiot brother, comes off no better with Joseph[1] than Mr. B. came off with Pamela. If her Ladyship could have but a single rouse! But the Comic Spirit is afoot; and she cannot. Also, she must not; for here comes Adams (the Rev. Abraham: sure the nearest thing to Don Quixote in English!); here come Fanny, and the incomparable Slipslop, and Beau Didapper, and the excellent Towwouses, and Trulliber and Betty, the Maid of the Inn, and—how many besides? Who knows? The book being a pure joy from beginning to end, who stops to count? As a Person of Consequence in letters once said to me:—'In *Joseph Andrews*, the Old Man'—(he talked of Fielding *ætat* 35, as 'the Old Man!')—'got

[1] That old affair of Mrs. Potiphar's goes on until this day.

his hands right into the guts of Life.' That says anything there is left to say about this gamesome and delightful Epic of the Road.[1] And it may stand here for all the 'critical' rubbish, which I might, but will not, accumulate about it.

1743 was the year of the *Miscellanies*: included in which, with much in prose and verse which is interesting to us only because Fielding thought it worth printing, are a *Journey to the Next World*, that odd, *The Miscellanies.*

[1] 'Tis a pleasure to record that it began as the success it is. It had not, one gathers, so instant and so splendid a triumph as *Pamela*; but there were Editions; and now, I take it, for one that reads the story of Mr. B. and the sublime Miss Richardson (for that, and nothing else, that is what Miss Pamela Andrews is) some sixty read the story of Joseph and Fanny. For the rest, it may be noted that Fornication, the sole Unpardonable Sin in English Fiction, is but a detail (as it is in life) in *Joseph Andrews*; but in much of *Pamela* it is the staple of the book. In the work done by the man who knew the world there is My Lady, there is Betty, there is the fair and desperate Slipslop, there are Didapper and Towwouse. But they are but circumstances: they fit in well enough, but they are nothing like the whole. Now, in *Pamela*, none is permitted to fornicate; yet the theme of the novel is Fornication. Mr. B. is always hovering round in a most dreadful and indecent state; and Pamela is always praying to be protected from a kind of Walking Phallus (as in a Kaulbach allegory), terribly menacing and ever ineffectual, or resisting its approaches, or writing to her parents to tell them that it has had no luck, and that she is still their Virgin child. Which is the more moral writer? Which the more buxom book?

clever half-success in the manner of Lucian; and *Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great*; that tremendous achievement in pure Irony, that masterpiece in a mode in which none save Swift has excelled this author.[1] *The Journey to the Next World* is ingenious and clever;

[1] And has he, has Swift himself, done better? I cannot think so. Mr. Saintsbury says the other thing; but I take leave to disagree. Swift was a master; but in all his work there is no Jonathan, no Miss Tishey, no Mr. Snap—in fact, no *Jonathan Wild the Great*. Sir Walter did not understand the book: he thought it was a piece of realism, and, as I believe, preferred his countryman Ferdinand Count Smollett. Thackeray, though he wrote very prettily of it, seems to have grasped the writer's purpose at least as ill as Scott had done before him. The truth is, the book is an exemplar, and the best we have, of a certain mode in letters; and the mode which it examples is Irony: a mode in which few Englishmen have excelled, and in whose practice even Mr. Meredith has come, at times, to hopeless grief. And for this reason it is isolated in English Letters. It is given to few to love Irony for its own sake; to still fewer to delight in the Ironical Presentation of life and character, which in this book Fielding essays with complete success. What did the vulgar think of it? What but that they have always thought of what they could not understand?

> Some Plays he wrote sans Wit or Plot,
> Adventures of Inferiors,
> Which with his lives of rogues and thieves
> Supply the Town's ———.

That was all they got from this unrivalled book; and I doubt not that Lady Mary, and Mr. Walpole, and Mr. S. Johnson, and Mr. Richardson, the celebrated novelist, got still less from it than these others. The ruck counts not; but I think that Mr. Johnson should have known better.

but it is not to be named in the same breath with *Jonathan Wild the Great*, which is in some ways Fielding's masterpiece, and which is certainly one of the masterpieces of English Literature.

Need I say anything about the rest of the *Miscellanies*? About the *Essay on Conversation*? Good as it is, it is only considerable because our Fielding wrote it. About the verses? In truth, all one can say of them is (*a*) that they are not bad, and (*b*) that some of them show the Poet in the act of making love to Miss Cradock. It is better to leave these things untouched, and to go on with the story of Fielding's life, so far as we know it. That story, so far as we know it, is very easily and briefly told. He went the Western Circuit; the gout took hold of him; he lost his wife, and eventually married her maid; he did lots of journalism, some of it witty and appropriate, but none of it worthy the author of *Jonathan Wild* and *Joseph Andrews*; in 1748 he was appointed a Justice of the Peace for Westminster. It was a poor post for a man like Henry Fielding: a man versed in law, already a great writer, an adept in humanity, a past-master of the ways and uses of

The story of Fielding's life.

Society. But it seems to have contented him; and he continued in it till he died. Also, he was evidently a most capable, humane, intelligent, and vigorous magistrate; or the Bow Street records printed in *The Covent Garden Journal* go for naught. Then, again, there is no doubt that he got his death in the pursuit of certain gangs of robbers, which gangs he, being then quite horribly ill, did utterly confound and annihilate. In the meanwhile, he published *Tom Jones* (1749) and *Amelia* (1751[1]); he endured the brutalities of Smollett, sick with envy and hate and rancour; he edited *The Covent Garden Journal.* Then the time came for him. His health was irreparably broken; he had dropsy, and he had gout; the Magnificent Young Man of not so many years ago was plainly dying. That he knew as much is certain: that he had lived his life, and here was the end. But he did not say so; and that thief-catching affair, however splendid a piece of good magistracy and good citizenship, may fairly be said to have but precipitated an inevitable event. Our sole satisfaction in it now is that he also was satisfied: he had

[1] Published in the December of that year; but dated 1752.

answered to the call of Authority; had done his duty and retired. When he sailed for Lisbon, his work was over; and he knew it. Still, he had enough of life and energy left to enact and write the circumstances of his pilgrimage; and, as I think, 'tis in this book, this *Voyage to Lisbon*, that we find the true Fielding. Modest, patient, suffering, ever dignified, perfectly whole-hearted, perfectly cheerful, perfectly resigned: in fact, the great Englishman whose ghost, if he have a ghost, has pretty certainly put Thackeray's on its knees long since, very much as in his real body he put his Captain on his marrow-bones in the cabin of that *Queen of Portugal* in which he sailed for Lisbon. Lisbon and Death. In Lisbon among *Os Cyprestes*, the secular trees in the English graveyard hard by, he lies until this day.

The Voyage to Lisbon.

There 's a bower of roses by Bendemeer's stream,
And the Nightingale sings in them all the day long.

So he does over the grave of Harry Fielding. Meanwhile 'Luget Britannia Gremio Non Dari Fovere Natum.' There is no more Fielding now. But we have not been idle.

Far from it. And there is now an infinite deal of Messrs. Howells and James.

VII

Taine's definition.

OF all the definitions that ever were defined Taine's definition of Fielding as 'a good buffalo' strikes me as one of the most absurd. But Taine, man of genius as he was born, and *savant* as he made himself, was at all times the prey of any theory that happened to commend itself to his imaginative yet very logical mind; and either this, his theory of Harry Fielding,[1] was one of the unluckiest he ever developed, or you can pay no man a higher compliment than to call him a Good Buffalo. For consider what, in Fielding's case, is comprehended in the term. Here is a man brave, generous,

[1] It was as Harry, I think, that he was known to the contemporary crowd: at all events to such of it as knew and loved him. I recall an odd instance. In certain records of the Old Bailey Sessions, purchased for professional uses by the late R. L. S., and devoutly perused by me, we came on a case of blackmailing, the details of which are happily unfit for print. One of the Hunters—John, I *think*—was a chief witness for the defence; and in the course of his evidence he noted that he had seen such a case before; at Bow St., 'in Harry Fielding's time.' I am sure of the quotation, though I have forgot the speaker's Christian name.

kind to the *n*th degree; a man with a great hatred of meanness and hypocrisy, and a strong regard for all forms of *virtus*, whether natural and impulsive or an effect of culture and reflection; an impassioned lover, a devout husband, a most cordial and careful father; so staunch a friend that his books are so many proofs of his capacity for friendship; of so sound a heart, of so vigorous a temperament, of so clear-eyed and serene a spirit, that years and calamities and disease do not exist for him, and he takes his leave of the World in one of the most valiant and most genial little books that ever was penned; distinguished among talkers by a delightful gaiety, a fine and gracious understanding, an inalienable dignity; withal of an intelligence at once so vigilant and so penetrating, at once so observant and so laborious and exacting, that, without hurry as without noise, patient ever and ever diligent, a master of life, a master of character, a master of style, he achieved for us the four great books we have, and, in achieving them, did so nobly by his nation and his mother tongue that he that would praise our splendid, all-comprehending speech aright has said the best he can of it

when he says that it is the speech of Shakespeare and Fielding. If to be a Good Buffalo be all that—(and in Harry Fielding's case it is all that, and more)—why, then, I can't help wishing that the breed were more prolific; and even that M. Henri Taine had himself belonged to it.

The Four Great Books.

I shall say nothing about the four great books, for the very simple reason that everything there is to say about them has been said. Like Dickens's work, and Scott's, but, as is inevitable and natural, to a still greater extent, as yet they are as essential a component in the mighty fabric of our Literature as the plays and poems of Shakespeare, or the poetry of Spenser and Milton, and Gibbon and John Bunyan, and Defoe's half-failures, and Mr. Boswell's biography. And when I say that to consider them: in all their stately shapeliness of plan, their admirable completeness of structure, their reasoned prodigality of detail and adornment: is for me about the same, neither more nor less, than considering St. Paul's, which I esteem the piece of architecture the nearest to perfection these eyes of mine have seen, it will be apprehended, I hope, that I keep not silence out of irreverence. But everybody

worth mentioning—(as Lady Mary, Gibbon, Gray, Scott, Coleridge, Byron, Thackeray, Dickens, George Eliot, Sir Leslie Stephen, Mr. Lang, Mr. Austin Dobson, Mr. Saintsbury,[1]) has spoken: and why should I essay

[1] Whose notes on Fielding are edifying and sagacious in no mean degree: especially the passages in which he deals with Mr. Jones's relations to Lady Bellaston, and seeks to explain Dr. Johnson's dislike of Fielding. Thackeray's view was distorted and obscured by the fact that (*a*) he was so terrible a Sentimentalist that he thought Amelia Sedley and Laura Bell ideals for which to live and die; (*b*) that he considered Fielding the Man a most improper Person; and (*c*) that he envied Fielding the Artist his chances, would have liked to make a real Man, as Fielding had done, and could do nothing better than the ingenuous Pendennis. Scott is, as they say, 'all right as far as he goes'; but he goes not very far, and, as I have said, he frankly prefers Smollett before Fielding, even to the extent of making the Englishman pick a quarrel with the Scot, and so completely falsifying history; the fact being, of course, that Smollett: who, take him all round, was a worse case of megalomania than Richardson himself: began by grossly insulting Fielding and his friend Lyttelton in the First edition of *Peregrine Pickle*, and went on to produce the really infamous pamphlet in which (1752) he professed to give an account of the strange and dreadful madness of one Habakkuk Hilding, 'trading justice and chapman.' Another critic, whose identity I will not discover, goes so far, in the vain endeavour to be original (an endeavour which hath made him eminently individual in the matter of facts and dates), as to ask if *Amelia* be not 'a little dull'? I will close this note by owning that Thackeray, if he, whether wilfully or stupidly, misunderstood and mis-stated the Man, was in absolute sympathy with the Writer, and that his eulogy of Fielding (in *The English Humourists*) is the most eloquent and the best there is.

to say something new and convincing after these? 'Tis enough that, as I think, Harry Fielding was a great and good man; who also, by premeditation and design, laboriously created an Art, and created it in such terms, and to such a purpose, that none has practised it since his time but must have worked and written differently if this immortal Master had not written and worked before him.

SMOLLETT

THE life of Smollett has been written by several hands in several styles: in the classic vein by his friend and imitator Dr. Moore, whose *Zeluco*, now almost unreadable, was long renowned as moving and most dangerous work; by Walter Scott, who, taking his author, as he took most things, His biographers.

> Like a gentleman at ease,
> With moral breadth of temperament,

produced a note on him that, despite a patriotism which makes the writer often take bladders for lanterns, none who wishes to esteem his Smollett can afford to leave unread; by Mr. David Hannay, whose little book is of peculiar value and interest to those who would know what was the Navy in which Smollett observed the originals of his most famous creations. There are others,[1]

[1] I can imagine no more useful summary of Smollett's adventures and capacities than that contributed by Mr. T. Seccombe in the *Dictionary of National Biography*: this,

notably Robert Chambers and an anonymous *Quarterly* Reviewer. But I think that any one who reads these three, and supplements his reading with Smollett *passim*, need read no more to be able to figure the man as he was. I purpose, then, to give but the briefest outline of the career, and to keep as close to the man—the humorous, arrogant, red-headed, stiff-necked, thin-skinned, scurrilous, brilliant, Scots hack of genius—as his novels will let me.

I

His boyhood.

IT is said that *Roderick Random* is largely an autobiography. If this be so—and it is scarce credible—then must Smollett have had a most bitter boyhood: a boyhood, truly, which would go far to account for the high-handed, hard-hitting, indiscriminating insolence and aggressiveness of his later years. By his own showing, he was hated by his grandfather, and by his cousins bullied into ferocity; all because his father had married out of his station, and by so doing had secured the lasting displeasure of his own

though I think that Mr. Seccombe is, like Scott, to his hero's faults a little blind, and to his hero's virtues rather kinder than he ought to be.

progenitor, and the immitigable hate and scorn of his time-serving kinsfolk. There is very little of all this in what is actually known of Smollett's life. He came of a house which, 'though in nowise ancient,' was in every sense respectable;[1] and his grandfather, Sir James of Bonhill—sometime a judge in the Commissary Court, often returned to the old Scots Parliament, a commissioner for the effecting of the Union between the Kingdoms—was by way of being a distinguished man. Sir James had four sons; and Smollett (Tobias George) was the youngest born of Archibald, the youngest of these. Now, it is certainly true that Archibald did not marry to please his father; but it is also written that Sir James, however sore his displeasure, and however hard-fisted and illiberal he may have been in general, behaved, in the sequel, quite handsomely, and established Archibald in a farm with an income of £300 a year. Archibald dying soon after the birth of Tobias George (1721), Sir James provided more or less generously for his widow and children; so that in the long run James, the eldest son,

His house.

[1] 'He was a gentleman of coat-armour, and in France would have been counted noble.'—HANNAY, *Smollett* (1887), p. 1.

got a commission, and rose to the command of a company, while Jean, the girl, was well and prosperously married, and Tobias George was apprenticed to a certain Gordon, who is said to figure as the Potion of his first novel, and who was, historically, a Glasgow surgeon and apothecary. Now, it is written that Tobias George, for all his stomach for filth—(a stomach, by the way, which may well have been developed in him by the circumstances of common life in the unabashed and unclean Scotland which he knew)—had a soul above clysters, and longed for nothing less than a pair of colours; and it is certain that Sir James, not only made an apothecary of him but also, ignored the widow and orphans of Archibald Smollett in his will; so it is conceivable that Tobias George, who was ever addicted to self-righteousness and never averse from misrepresentation, should, in a fit of fury, have grossly libelled his intimates and very scandalously misstated his environment. But in the preface to his novel he is careful to note that he made his hero a Scot because, for one thing, a Scot might be poor and yet well educated, which an Englishman could not be; for another, because he could 're-

Apprenticed to a surgeon.

present simplicity of manners in a remote part of the kingdom with more propriety than in any place near the capital'; and, for another, because the Scot was of a wandering habit, and might therefore figure naturally as the hero of a novel of adventure. Moreover, writing years afterwards (1763), he is moved to declare that the resemblance between himself and Roderick Random is merely general.[1] Inasmuch, then, as he takes pains to figure his associates in the vilest terms, and to present his circumstances as immitigably squalid; inasmuch, too, as in *Humphry Clinker* he wipes up some of the dirt which he has scattered in *Roderick Random*;[2] it is fair to infer that the interest of his first novel is autobiographical only because the writer speaks in the first person, and speaks with bitterness and point enough

His resemblance to Roderick Random.

[1] 'The only similitude between the circumstances of my own fortune, and those I have attributed to Roderick Random, consists in my being born of a respectable family in Scotland, in my being bred a surgeon, and having served as a surgeon's mate on board a man-of-war during the expedition of Carthagena. The low situations in which I have exhibited Roderick I never experienced in my own person.'—SMOLLETT, 'To ——, New Jersey, North America.' London, May 1763.

[2] 'I was introduced,' Mr. Matthew Bramble says, 'to Mr. Gordon, patriot of a truly noble spirit, who is father of the linen manufacture in that place, and was the great promoter

to make his readers believe that his particularity is not less authentic than the broader lines on which he works are unassailable. And this, for Smollett's sake, I am very willing to believe.[1]

Whether Gordon, Smollett's master, sat or not for Potion, it is certain that he thought kindly and well of his 'ain bubbly-nosed callant wi' the stane in his pouch';[2]

of the city workhouse, public infirmary, and other works of public utility. Had he lived in ancient Rome he would have been honoured with a statue at the public expense' (*Humphry Clinker*. 'To Dr. Lewis. Cameron, August 28'). No doubt; but he lived in Eighteenth Century Glasgow, and is remembered, if at all, as Smollett's Mr. Potion.

[1] All the same, the great and deserved success of *Roderick Random* was partially a *succès de scandale*. Potion, Crab, and Squire Gawkey were, Scott says, at once identified; so was Roderick's grandfather; divers persons contended for the honour of originating Strap—much as there were several claimants to the honour of sitting out with Burns 'Amang the rigs o' barley'; Oakum and Whiffle, Marmozet and Sheerwit and Narcissa—to the public of 1748 all these were plain as the nose on your face. As Roderick's uncle, honest Bowling should, one thinks, have come in for his share of recognition. But the presence on Leven side of this arrant and indubitable Englishman would have been ruinous to the theory. So he was ignored. For the rest, the lack of what is called 'atmosphere,' the absence of local colour, whether deliberate or not, are such that the incidents and characters of Smollett's earlier chapters would fit the Spain of *Gil Blas* almost as well as the West of Scotland.

[2] *Anglicé*, his 'own snotty-nosed youngster with the stone in his pocket': a description not less discrediting to Tobias George's

and whether Smollett was or was not bullied into savagery by his cousins, it is certain that, according to Mr. Colquhoun of Camstradden, his conversation in these his 'prentice days consisted in a 'continued string of epigrammatic sarcasm,' for which 'no talents could compensate.' It is possible that, in the intervals of dispensing medicines for Potion, he attended lectures at Glasgow University; but of this there is no trace in that 'angry travesty'[1] of his earlier years, which he introduced into *Roderick Random*, and on which the autobiographical theory is based. If, however, the theory suffer at this point—(it is plain that Smollett was well grounded and well read)—its claim to consideration is in some sort re-integrated by the fact that, like Random, Smollett wrote a tragedy in his 'teens, and that, like Random, he presently took the road to London. That he went by waggon is probable;[2] and that on the way he encountered with the tremendous Rifle, the engaging

The road to London.

practice of cleanliness—(Roderick, by the way, is eagerly dandified and poetical)—than it is honourable to his capacity for readiness and resource in the matter of practical ruffianism.

[1] HANNAY, *Smollett*, p. 67.

[2] 'Twas a means of transport favoured by his countrymen.

Miss Ramper, the sharping, fiddling curate, the distinguished Billy Weazle and his lady, and the Horatian ale-draper—this also is probable; for he has described all these experiences with a gust, an airy and brilliant exactness, an abounding sense of the ridiculous, which make for conviction in his readers even now, as they have made for conviction in them ever since he wrote. As convincing, as vivid, as *vécues*, every whit are Roderick-Smollett's experiences of London citizens and London streets, his account of which is solemnly adduced, I believe, as one of the reasons why his countrymen have never taken him to their hearts for the rare *amuseur* that he was. It is (I am told) an article of faith in Scotland that the Scot can never be other than wilfully absurd. This is just as true, of course, as the counter-proposition; that, whether wilfully or not, he can never be anything else. But 'tis an article of faith; and it would seem that Smollett was predestined to figure as a sort

Thus, CHURCHILL, *The Prophesy of Famine* (1762), concerning Scotland:—

> To that rare soil, where virtues clust'ring grow,
> What mighty blessings doth not England owe?
> What *waggon-loads* of courage, wealth, and sense,
> Doth each revolving day import from hence?

of sacrifice to Burns. The sense of *A Man's a Man* and *Tam O'Shanter* and the glorious Twenty-Fifth of January, all latent and impending, was contained in his birthright; and, in ignoring it, and, in parading himself as a Scot bewildered and befooled, he was unequal to his opportunity, and, besides, was false to his tradition. True, that tradition as yet was unsuspected; but it was none the less real and imperious; especially to the sectaries born a hundred years after Strap and Roderick had been hailed for the gawks they were, and their creator had shown himself worthy his inspiration and his chance. A brilliant and diverting piece of farce he made of it; and yet, 'tis said, his countrymen have ever held it as the unpardonable thing. The explanation is, they are a people which breeds great humorists; but they are not a humorous people.

II

The Regicide.

IT does not appear that Smollett purposed to practise his art in London; or, if he did so purpose, that he meant his practice to be anything but a means to a higher end, which end was literature. The fact is, he

had a tragedy in his pocket; a Scots-historical tragedy; a tragedy done after the best models, and assured—partly for that reason, but chiefly because it was the work of Tobias George Smollett—of immediate and conspicuous success. It is a tedious performance; faint in outline, tame in workmanship, utterly insipid in effect, and written in that inexpressive, colourless, correct iambic which the Eighteenth Century was pleased to consider an improvement upon the medium of Shakespeare. But, such as it is, Smollett loved it dearly, and his failure to convince the world of its intrinsic excellence was a bitter and exasperating memory during many years.[1] That he expected it

[1] It is called *The Regicide*, and deals in a lofty, high-sniffing, perfunctory way with the murder of James I. They may read it who can in the Twelfth Volume of the present Edition. So far as I can see, the most that can be said for it is, that it is carefully written. For particulars in its dispraise see HANNAY (*Smollett*, pp. 23-27) and CHURCHILL, *The Apology* (1761):—

> Who ever read *The Regicide* but swore
> The author wrote as man ne'er wrote before?
> Others for plots and underplots may call,
> Here 's the right method—have no plot at all.
> Who can so often in his cause engage
> The tiny pathos of the Grecian stage,
> Whilst horrors rise, and tears spontaneous flow
> At tragic *Hah*! and no less tragic *Oh*!
> To praise his nervous weakness all agree;
> And as for sweetness who so sweet as he!

to bring him gold and glory is most certain; his disappointment else had been far less keen, his ill-humour nothing like so rancorous and so lasting. An introduction to Lord Lyttelton,[1] the friend of Thomson and Fielding, the dedicatee of *Tom Jones* brought the young tragic into communication with Garrick, and resulted, in the sequel, in the gibbeting of both Garrick and Lyttelton, the one as Mr. Marmozet, the other as Sheerwit, in *Roderick Random*; together with the introduction of Lyttelton as Gosling Scrag into the First Edition of *Peregrine Pickle* (1751), and the *Faithful Narrative, etc.* (1752), and the ill-bred and contemptible *Burlesque Ode*, in which was parodied Lyttelton's *Monody* on the death of his wife. To Smollett, indeed, *The Regicide* was certainly the dearest of his works. He never forgot nor forgave the circum-

Garrick and Lyttelton.

> Too big for utterance when sorrows swell,
> The too big sorrows flowing tears must tell,
> But when those flowing tears shall cease to flow
> Why—then, then the voice must speak again, you know.

For the rest, the author's partiality was notorious; and, so far as I know, 'twas quizzed by everybody who took up arms against him.

[1] Probably, Mr. Hannay thinks, through Malloch, or Mallet, his lordship's secretary, the 'beggarly Scotchman' of Johnson's famous description.

stances of its reception; and when he published the poor thing (1749), after the success of *Roderick Random*, it was with a preface that remains a monument of exasperated vanity and petulant, undignified resentment.[1]

This was later. For the present, the tragedy a proved failure, the glories of Drury Lane—'the silk stockings and white bosoms of your actresses'—remote as the light on Beulah's hills, Smollett had perforce to do the work he could or starve. He might, of course, have hired himself out to another Potion, and for him spread cataplasms and compounded clysters until he

[1] Garrick was forgiven in the long run; but not until money had passed, and the Smollett of *The Regicide* had blossomed into the Smollett of *The Reprisal*, which Garrick, not only produced but, helped with a gift of twenty guineas towards the author's expenses, besides 'playing it on,' in one of his best parts. Hence the fair—not to say fulsome—speeches in the *History* (1757-65), in which there are kindnesses for Lyttelton also, and, with Lyttelton, Henry Fielding. Him Smollett hated and depreciated on several grounds: as his superior in art, as a successful writer for the stage, as Lyttelton's friend and Garrick's, as a person who dared to jibe in print at *Peregrine Pickle*. For the rest, the actor Smollett loved was—not Garrick but—Quin: between himself and whom there is place for a not uninteresting parallel. Garrick, it should be noted, is the hero of *The Rosciad*, the reception of which by somebody in Smollett's name and Smollett's pay, made Churchill, as we shall see, his sturdiest enemy.

felt himself strong enough to spread and compound on his own account. Happily for letters, happily for posterity, happily (so Mr. Hannay tells us) for his country, he found such practice impossible, and got a berth as surgeon's mate on one of the ships which in 1740 sailed, under Vernon, on the expedition to Cartagena.[1] The navy was at this time at its worst. Its spirit was rebellious and self-seeking, its manners were ruffianly, its tradition had fallen into contempt. It was lacking neither in good officers nor in good seamen; it was capable of notable work—as, for instance, Anson's voyage—of exemplary patience, bold initiative, enduring and desperate hardihood; most of the qualities which, some sixty years hence, were to make it the saviour of the realm. But in the main, it was brutalised almost beyond report, thought, or belief; it was horribly ill-found; it was largely the creation of the press-gang, and so was riddled through and through with 'smugglers, pirates, poachers, burglars, highway-

Smollett, a surgeon's mate.

[1] Chambers conjectures that he was helped into the place by Sir Andrew Mitchell, secretary to the Marquess of Tweeddale, sometime Minister for Scotland (1742-5), and Minister at the Court of Frederick the Great during the Seven Years War.

men, and insolvent debtors';[1] it was officered by a set of men who were part seamen, part politicians, and part ruffians; it detested the soldier, and would a thousand times rather wrangle with him than render him assistance, or accept assistance at his hands. This was the navy as Smollett knew it—this the navy as he saw it at work at Cartagena; and 'tis small wonder if his story of it, whether in *Roderick Random*, which is a piece of fiction, or in his *Account of the Expedition against Cartagena*, which is a piece of history, must, even at this day, be read with tears of wrath and shame. Thanks to Smollett, Mr. Hannay thinks, the expedition 'became a warning, and so helped to prevent the recurrence of anything quite

The Navy as he knew it.

[1] Hannay, *Smollett* (1887), p. 33. At this point, being a mere layman, I do but summarise or transcribe from Mr. Hannay's book, which—to those who would know anything of Smollett's originals—of his warrant, that is, for Crampley and Trunnion, for Morgan and Bowling and Mackshane—is merely indispensable. See, further, his article in *Blackwood* for August 1888, called 'Smollett And The Old Sea-Dogs,' wherein are discussed the possibilities of Trunnion and Oakum. Writing in 1887, Mr. Hannay thought that no post-captain could ever have been altogether so bad a brute as Oakum; but a report of the proceedings in the case of the Hon. Edward Hervey, of the *Superb*, court-martialled at Spithead, in the August of 1742, has since (he tells me) constrained him to change his opinion.

so disgraceful in after times.' And the reason is plain:—'Admirals and generals' went on quarrelling and bungling; but 'at least they took pains to avoid being as [Admiral] Vernon and [General] Wentworth.' In the end, we had to shoot Byng —*pour décourager des autres*; to prevent our admirals and generals, that is, from entertaining the theory that war is a private adventure at the public expense, and that he comes best out of it who brings with him the head of an adventurer in the rival service. If Smollett helped to do that, he did an admirable work, and has his share, not only in the formation of the firing-party which made an end of Byng but also, in the creation of that navy whose 'crowning mercies' are Copenhagen, the Nile, Trafalgar. Go we as far as this or not, one thing is certain: that he knew the navy of his time as the navy has been known to no man writing since his time, excepting only Dibdin and Marryat. Practically, in fact, he revealed the British seaman as material for letters—divined his character, sketched his outlines, formulated his lingo, discovered his possibilities, to such a purpose, that there is never an artist who has treated that gallant

and engaging creature since but owes him something;[1] so that, in this if in no other matter, he may fairly be said to have left a brilliant and enduring mark on the literature of England.

His marriage.

In the meantime Smollett went with Vernon and the fleet from Cartagena to Jamaica, and in Jamaica, quitting the service, he found a wife, and stayed. The lady's name was Anne Lascelles, and she is said to have been the original of Narcissa, as she is no doubt the heroine of her husband's *Ode to Blue-Eyed Ann* :—

> When the rough North forgets to howl,
> And Ocean's billows cease to roll;
> When Lybia's sands are bound in frost,
> And cold to Nova Zembla's lost!
> When heav'nly bodies cease to move,
> My blue-ey'd Ann I'll cease to love.[2]

[1] I do not forget that, after Chaucer's Shipman, the earliest seaman in English letters is Congreve's Ben, in *Love for Love* (1695): still less that Oakum and Whiffle—the germ, too, of Trunnion, the tarpaulin Commodore—are contained in the Commodore Flip and the Captain Mizen of Charles Shadwell's play, *The Fair Quaker of Deal* (1710). But I am told that Ben, howbeit he is acutely observed, is a landsman's sailor after all; and I can testify to the fact that, while Flip and Mizen and the rest of Shadwell's lot are credible so far as they go, they are wholly lacking in that gay, convincing, sympathetic *maëstria* which is the mark of Smollett's decent seamen, from Lieutenant Bowling down to Captain Crowe.

[2] 'Twas thus they wooed the melting Muse *c.* 1742. The

The lady was ('tis plain) a beauty, and in her way was something of a fortune ;[1] and, though nothing is known, it may be conjectured with Mr. Hannay—(Mr. Seccombe is of another way of thinking)—that Smollett married in Jamaica, and came to London on 'the comfortable though moderate estate' which, thanks to Miss Lascelles, he 'enjoyed.' He seems to have tried to establish himself as a physician ; and he is heard of as a householder in Westminster and in Mayfair. But it avails him nothing. He is a man of letters at heart ; that wonderful

sentiment of Smollett's *Ode* is precisely that of *O, My Luve's Like a Red, Red Rose*, the spawn of which admirable ditty was floating even then about in time, till it could find a poet on whom to cling and coalesce. Burns was a lad of eleven when Smollett died, and Smollett's friend, *Zeluco* Moore, was one of his admiring correspondents. Yet there seems a hundred years between the two.

[1] 'Through whom,' writes Smollett to his American correspondent, 'I enjoy (1767) a comfortable, though moderate, estate.' Scott says that the fortune turned out to be a lawsuit, and it is certain that Smollett often wanted money, and none from Jamaica was forthcoming. But it is also certain that he habitually lived beyond his income, and that, with nothing but what Miss Lascelles brought him, he contrived to live in London with respect and dignity between 1744, when he left Jamaica, and 1748, when he published *Roderick Random* ; so that, in the beginning at least, one may infer that his case was no worse than that of most colonial owners, who spent more than they ought, and found their rents less easy to come by than they wished.

Regicide is still unpublished and unplayed; he still goes up and down in its behalf. He writes an opera, and Handel is to furnish the music; but there is a row, and Handel takes his music elsewhere, and Smollett is left alone with his manager and his book (*Alceste*); and in *Reproof: A Satire*,[1] he tells that manager what he thinks of him (1747):—

A quarrel with Rich.

> Let RICH, with dulness and devotion drunk,
> Enjoy the peal so barbarous and loud,
> While his brain spues new monsters to the crowd.

It was all to no purpose. Drunk or sober, Rich remained unmoved; and, what was worse, so did the 'dear, d——nd, distracting Town.' Smollett, though, had but begun. His failures, however bitterly he resented them, were, after all, of scant account; as yet he had said nothing which could not have been at least as aptly said by somebody else; it was still for him to show whether

[1] *Reproof* is his second essay in the *genre*. The first, *Advice* (1746), is chiefly remarkable for the freedom and gaiety with which, in the verse of the text as in the prose of the notes, the writer, who was not long married, dilates upon the prevalence of unnatural crime. For the rest, both pieces are written in the good old Popeian couplet, are couched in the good old Popeian vein, and might (their insolence apart) have been written by any discontented poetaster of the time.

he was man of genius or bookseller's hack. In the sequel he turned out a kind of linsey-woolsey, part one thing and part t'other. But he began by approving himself a man of genius; for in the January of 1748, being in his twenty-seventh year, he published *The Adventures of Roderick Random*, and came into all men's view as the author of a new departure in the English Novel.

Roderick Random.

III

FIELDING derived himself from Cervantes; Smollett's acknowledged exemplar was Le Sage. Writing angrily and truculently where Le Sage had written with an urbane and intelligent smile; writing, too, with an utter contempt for the good taste, the good breeding, the reticence, the ironical and far-reaching amenity, which, as being essentials in the great tradition of French literature, were so to say inherent in Le Sage; he set forth, so he avers, 'to represent modest merit'—in the person of Roderick Random!—'struggling with every difficulty to which a friendless orphan is exposed, from his own want of experience, as well as from the

Smollett and Le Sage.

selfishness, envy, malice, and base indifference of mankind.' Here, in other words, was the *novela picaresca* adapted to English uses and turned to English ends; and Le Sage himself, through whom its achievement was made possible, must certainly, could he have read, have been constrained to smile approval on the event.

The book was hard, coarse, cruel—a rough-and-tumble hurly-burly of impudent, squalid, and unedifying adventure; but it was novel, it was brilliant, it had touches of tenderness, it teemed with vividly seen and instantly presented character, it abounded in life and spirit and fun. It achieved a very great success;[1] and Smollett, taking the ball at the hop, promptly published . . . *The Regicide* (1749). It is inconceivable, I know; but it is so, and that so it is is the most surprising thing in literary history. Most men, I take it, who have written a tragedy at eighteen, are very glad to ignore the beast's existence. If they think of it at all, it is with terror; lest an enemy get

The Regicide published.

[1] 'Lyttelton was so intimidated by the ferocity with which Smollett bore his triumph that "fear of Smollett" is said to have been the primary cause of the protracted delay in the appearance of his *Henry II.*'—Seccombe (*D. N. B.*).

hold of it, and make life a burden and a shame to them by enlarging on its beauties to the world. Or screeds of it come back to them in the vigils of the night, and they hate and despise themselves for that they could ever have been thus imbecile, thus forsaken and forlorn of God. Not so this Scotchman! A violent and pitiless *farceur*, and—if you object not to his familiarity with the *chaise percée* and its concomitants an excellent artist in farce, he cherishes his beggarly bantling all the more dearly for its innate and irremediable beggarliness. The explanation is, of course, that, in so far as the works of Tobias George Smollett, Esquire, M.D., are concerned, his state of mind is that which has been, and still is, ingeniously described as 'a fool's paradise.' I do not doubt that he was ever ready to declaim his iambics to any honest parasite who would take a sneaker of punch with him; and I am convinced, though I have no proof of my conviction, that in the long hours between sleep and sleep he must often have got the most he could out of his enforced leisure by—not blushing for his offence, nor calling on the bedclothes to hide him from the wrath of Apollo, but—

rolling certain choice morsels on his tongue :—

> Rage on, fierce youth, more savage than the storm
> That howls on Thule's shore!—th' unthrifty maid,
> Too credulously fond! who gave away
> The heart so lavishly, deserves to wed
> The woes that from her indiscretion flow!
> Yet were my folly shared with thee, etc. :—

and thinking to himself, while poor Narcissa —(of whom I cannot conceive as intellectual) —slept peacefully at his back, that *here* is tragedy. Pity and terror, the Aristotelian prescription in full blast, in fact—here they are; and if they be not here, then where? —('Yes, by heaven! I ask you where?') —*where* are you to look for them? So Hogarth, when somebody, whom he has just dismissed as a jackass for comparing Handel and a long-forgotten composer of music, is cited as declaring that he (Hogarth) could paint as good a portrait as Van Dyck :— 'And so I can, by God! Give me my time, and let me choose my subject.' There is no comparison, of course; for *The Regicide* is rubbish, however you take it, and a good Hogarth is good art, whether it be comparable to a good Van Dyck or not. But Smollett could have been no fiercer, had *The Regicide* been as good tragedy as the

Captain Coram (say) is good portraiture. He was the vainest of mankind, in truth; and—for many years at least—whatever he did was made eminent and admirable to him by the mere circumstance that he had done it.

Smollett's vanity.

This is but another way of saying that he lacked all sense of proportion: so that he seriously esteemed himself—not merely a great neglected tragic, but also—the only English Novelist. Henry Fielding, for instance, may be said to have done him wrong intolerable by publishing *Joseph Andrews* (1742), and *Jonathan Wild the Great* (1743), some years before the appearance of *Roderick Random* (1748); to have worsened the effect of these nefarious proceedings by producing *Tom Jones* in 1749—the year of *The Regicide*; and to have added insult to injury (so to speak) by putting out *Amelia* in 1751—the very year in which, according to Smollett, there should be no public for any book but *Peregrine Pickle.* About the same time, too, he, or a friend of his—Gosling Scrag, or some scandalous ruffian in that ridiculous impostor's pay!—writing over the signature of Sir Alexander Drawcansir, distinctly cheapened *Pickle* and *Random* both, in just such an obscene sheet

as you might expect from a trading justice who had married his cook, and tried to make ends meet by the composition of what he—(poor beast!)—called novels. To the Unique Novelist, the sole and only Author of *The Regicide*—that immortal play!—of *Reproof* and *Advice*—those extraordinary essays in satire!—of *Roderick Random*—that singular exemplar of all that is essential in fiction!—of *Gil Blas*,[1] that achievement in translation!—*Amelia*—('Another so-called masterpiece, by God!')—was more than this particular sample of flesh-and-blood could bear. True, he had gone out of his way to speak his mind about what he thought of Lyttelton—(still harping on *The Regicide*, you see!)—and of Lyttelton's friend,—the friend, too, of that triple scoundrel and ignoramus, Garrick!—the author of *Joseph Andrews*, and *Jonathan Wild*, and *Tom Jones* in the First Edition of *Pickle*.[2] But

[1] Published in 1749—the year after *Roderick Random*: the year, in fact, of *The Regicide*. Smollett confessed to the translation of *Gil Blas*; so that, whether he made or merely revised and corrected, it is certain—(for *Gil Blas* is a bulky as well as a notable book)—that his apprenticeship to hack-work was fairly well accomplished before he took the town with *Random*.

[2] 'I advise Mr. Spondy to give him' (Gosling Scrag = Lyttelton) 'the refusal of this same pastoral, and who knows

he had thought better of it, and had magnanimously purged his Second Edition of offence. And then, this rag, this *Covent Garden Journal*, presuming on his loftiness of soul, was actually ill-advised enough to laugh at the new masterpiece! Ingratitude so base, so insolent, so inhuman, was not to go unchastised. Nor did it. Smollett, whether or not he had repented him of his deviation into decency, rose to the occasion with as it were a howl of joy, and in his *Faithful Narrative of the Base and Inhuman Arts that Were Lately Practised on the Brain of Habakkuk Hilding, Justice and Chapman*[1] (1752), retorted on his illustrious

His attack upon Fielding.

but he may have the good fortune of being listed in the number of his' (Gosling Scrag's) 'benefactors, in which case he may, in process of time, be provided for in the Customs or Church; and when he is inclined to marry his own cook-maid, his gracious patron may condescend to give the bride away, and may finally settle him in his old age as a trading Westminster Justice.' This pleasing passage was 'expunged' from the Second Edition of *Pickle* (1751); and perhaps the broken-down, over-worked, dropsical poor devil, who created the English Novel, ought to have truckled to the insult, owned the brilliant North British imitator of Le Sage for his master, and let things go as Smollett thought they ought. Walter Scott, writing as a good patriot, is disposed to halve the blame with Fielding. But the author of this, the initial insult, was Smollett.

[1] The piece is little known, and for the benefit of the curious it is reprinted with an explanatory note, among my author's miscellanies in the Twelfth Volume of Messrs. Constable's Edition.

rival in a strain of shameless and savage ridicule which is hard to forgive and wholly impossible to forget. Already broken in constitution, Fielding had by this time completed that achievement in art which no Englishman considers without a sense of gratitude and pride, and was very soon (1754) to sink under his fatigues, and to expire in exile at Lisbon. Smollett had as little respect for his elder in years, and labours, and trials, as he had reverence or admiration for his master in letters. It pleased him to be insolent, scurrilous, indecent; and he had his way.

It is, as will be seen, of scandalous indecency, and marks off Smollett the literary controversialist to much the same purpose as Smollett the disappointed politician is marked off in the *Adventures of an Atom*. It was, no doubt, a galling reflection to the writer that Fielding, as well as being a dangerous rival in art, was better born and better bred and better educated than himself: that he had of right the entry to a *monde* which Smollett could approach but as an inspector of urinals and an authority upon evacuations. So he is careful to note, among other amenities, that Fielding had certainly been a bulker, and, among other shifts, had blown a trumpet at Bartholomew Fair, and had for some time served as bully in a brothel. Of course this is only pretty Fanny's way. But if pretty Fanny have this way, it has to be admitted that the only word for her is that one which of all others fell so ill upon the ear of Mrs. Jonathan Wild (*née* Snap). More significant than most of the riot of dirty-minded rancour is the passage in which Smollett is pleased to insinuate that Miss Matthews and Partridge are plagiarised from Miss Williams and Strap.

Meanwhile, *Peregrine Pickle* had achieved a very brilliant success: partly on its merits and partly because the author had inserted in it the notorious *Memoirs of a Lady of Quality*. That the interpolation had nothing whatever to do with the rest of the book, seems to have mattered nothing to the assailant of Henry Fielding. It was 'good copy,' anyhow; for, in the first place, the lady most concerned in it paid him handsomely for its production; and, in the second, it was so scandalous in detail, and, to a certain class of mind, so taking in effect, that it could not but serve as an admirable 'send-off' to Pickle and Pipes and Trunnion in the inimaginable event of these being found unpleasing to the general. He threw in, as I have shown, some personalities on his own account—together with divers experiments in farce at which the Town was pleased to stop its nose; and these, the Town being that way moved, he was easily persuaded to 'expunge': together, as he flattered himself, with 'every adventure, phrase, and insinuation that could be construed by the most delicate reader into a trespass upon the rules of decorum.' The

Peregrine Pickle.

Memoirs of a Lady of Quality[1] he retained, and to this day they are printed as an integral part of his novel. That novel is neither his best nor his worst; but it is good enough even now, and in its hey-day it cannot but have seemed a piece of rare excellence. Like *Random*, it is hard and cruel and cold; like *Random*, it is a

Hard and cruel and cold.

[1] The Lady of Quality, Horace Walpole's 'living academy of love lore,' was Frances, Viscountess Vane, *née* Hawes. At nineteen, having no dowry but her beauty, which seems to have been complete, she married (1732) Lord William, 'second son by his second wife of James Douglas, Fourth Duke of Hamilton and First Duke of Brandon (*D. N. B.*)'; and, as Lord William had no more money than herself, Queen Caroline was pleased to describe the pair as 'the handsome beggars.' In 1734 Lord William died, and in 1735 she married the second Viscount Vane, and proceeded to lead the unhappy gentleman, who adored her, and for whom 'she always expressed an exaggerated abhorrence,' (*D.N.B.*) what is vaguely but expressly called 'a life.' As she danced the minuet with peculiar grace and finish, had no care for any one but herself, was capricious, insolent, extravagant *au possible*, and was a man's woman in every fibre of her being, her husband was soon the most flagrant cuckold in Europe. He never would divorce, however; and, after being twenty years bedfast, at seventy-five she died Viscountess Vane. In the birth-year of *Peregrine Pickle*, being a woman of thirty-eight, she was, if Pickle's historian—(her 'subaltern admirer' Lady Mary terms him)—be a credible witness, a past-mistress of the art of pleasing—gay, beautiful, gracious, benevolent. Whether or not the said historian was ever in love with her, and whether or not there ever passed between them more 'civil things' (in Sir John Brute's phrase) than the communication

welter of folly and ruffianism; like *Random*, it touches you not as a work of art, but is remembered only as a thing of broken lights and disparted and intermittent achievement. But, like *Random*, it is invented and written with a brilliancy, an assurance, a masterful and easy adaptation of means to ends, that make the first reading, even in these days, an experience. Does any one recall his introduction in the fact to those riotous offences against the moral code whose presentment makes up the tragedy of the life

of manuscript and coin, none knows, nor at this date will any know. What is certain is that Peregrine and the historian are extremely respectful to her; and that her notion of explaining herself to the world through the means and by the aid of the Coming Novelist, was a touch of genius which her biographers have not honoured as they ought. I note, in her connexion, that Fielding (*Covent Garden Journal*, Jan. 14, 1752) remarks of 'one Peeragrin Puckle,' that 'his hopes of victory were found to be in *vain*.' Also, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu thought that, 'rightly understood,' the story of Lady Vane 'would be more instructive to young women than any sermon'; for that there they might see 'what mortifications and varieties of misery are the unavoidable consequences of gallantry'; so that 'there is no rational creature that would not prefer the life of the strictest Carmelite to the round of hurry and misfortune she has gone through.' One would like to hear Lady Vane on Lady Mary. See further Lady Anne Hamilton (that illiberal shrew), *Epics of the Ton*, i. 21-22, (Third Edition, 1807):—

> Or with poor SMOLLET, fain for gold to tickle,
> Wrought up with liquorish gust the feats of *Pickle*:—

and Note.

and death of Punch? 'Tis much the same with *Pickle.* Look at it in one humour, and from a certain point of view, and Peregrine—'the savage and ferocious Pickle' (SCOTT): the most truculent and unamiable scoundrel ever invested with heroic dignity—is, as the boy Dickens remembered Random, 'no ruffian, but a modest and engaging hero'; and Pipes, Trunnion, Gauntlett, Peregrine's bunter mistress, Hatchway, that notable naval wag, Emilia, that most disconcerting exemplar of Smollett's ideal of Virginity, Crabtree—even Crabtree!—are found, these and their fellows—Pallet, the fair Fleming, Old Pickle, Mrs. Trunnion, the Friar, the Poet, and the rest—are found to be in any case amusing. Viewed in another humour, and from another coign of speculation, they approve themselves the fantastic, sordid, indecent figments of humanity they are. It is farce, and farce again, and farce almost to the end: the saving touch being found in Trunnion, who, beginning as a rather ignoble caricature, grows more and more human as he goes on, till at the last he desires to be 'buried in the red jacket I had on when I boarded and took the *Renummy,*' and to have his epitaph

The excellence of Trunnion.

written 'not in the Greek or Latin lingoes, and much less in the French, which I abominate, but in plain English,' to the end that 'when the angel comes to pipe *all hands* at the great day,[1] he may know that I am a British man, and speak to me in my mother-tongue.' All the death-bed is as good as this; and, having read it, one returns upon the consideration of Peregrine's achievements with a sour stomach and an unwilling eye: until one ends on the reflection that the half of Smollett was not told unto him, so that he never guessed, so contemptuous of everything but farce was he, how good a humorist, in the sense that Shakespeare and Fielding and Dickens are humorists, he might have been.

Count Fathom.

That he never so much as guessed at it is clear. There is no Bowling, no Morgan, no Pipes, no Hatchway even, in his next novel, *Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753), in which, if we subtract from it the 'Dedication'—(in which Smollett the novelist, being at this time a man of two-and-thirty, tells

[1] Yet shall poor Tom find pleasant weather
When He, Who all commands,
Shall give, to call life's crew together,
The word to pipe all hands.
DIBDIN, *The Oddities*, 1789.

Smollett the doctor and man about town what he thinks of him)—and the admirable First Chapter, which is as good a piece of invention and writing as anything under the Trunnion-Lismahago level which Smollett ever did, there is not much to praise. Time was when Fathom seemed such a devil of a fellow that the story of his villainies was held to be dangerous and unedifying. But that time is long since with that which was 'when King Pepin of France was a little boy,' and your London 'prentice was admonished against the practice of killing uncles and consorting with Millwoods by the solemn performance of *George Barnwell*.[1] It is hard to read *Count Fathom* now, for the simple reason that the Wicked Hero, and the Virtuous Hero, and the Virtuous

[1] Says Mr. Walter Raleigh in his scholarly and excellent treatise, *The English Novel* (p. 188) :—'It is a coarse morality at best that is taught by repulsion from vice, and the plea is often hypocritical.' That is true. But our grandsires thought not so; and it is also true that for a long time *Fathom* was accounted pernicious reading. If you had 'a good disposition and well-regulated mind,' you could not choose but hold him for 'a disgusting pollution of the imagination'; while, if you had not (I abridge the argument), you must certainly 'catch infection from stories of wickedness, and feel an insane impulse to emulate, and to realise, the pictures of villainy, which are embodied in such narratives as those of Zeluco or Count Fathom.' To say that this was written by—not Hannah

Heroine, and all the figures in the book—(which, by the way, sets forth in its impassioned parts an intolerable deal of blank verse disguised as prose)—are sawdust all. 'Tis impossible to believe in the crimes of the one as in the sufferings of the others; and the sole care of him that reads is to get his reading done as soon as ever he can, and then forget what he has read as soon as ever he may. Yet the book is not without interests of its own. That Smollett valued it is plain—for he revived his penitent scoundrel in a book written nearly twenty years after the publication of *Fathom*; and to me, at least, it is not incredible that, his vanity being what it was, he wrote this story of a villain to show how Fielding

More but—Walter Scott, is to say everything. 'Tis to be noted, however, that, always a good North Briton, Scott, if he cared little for *Fathom*, cared very much less for *Jonathan Wild*. He is at some pains to contrast the two, and the result of his effort is very much to the advantage of the later work. As, however, he has read the earlier to so little purpose that never for a moment is he conscious that it is a piece of pure irony; as he is even moved to entertain 'a suspicion' that Fielding 'used the title of *Jonathan Wild* in order to connect his book with the popular renown of that infamous depredator'—that, in plain English, he is dealing with a chap-book—we may treat his opinion as Captain Shandy would have treated that work which the great Lipsius composed the day he was born.

should have written that of Jonathan Wild. Be this as it may, there are attempts at terror in *Fathom* which are unique, so far as I know, in the early English Novel.[1] Again, there is never a champion of Smollett, however passionate and whole-hearted, but must admit that, as literature, *Fathom* is a failure. All the same, it is a lasting testimony to the vivacity, the adventurous apprehensiveness, of Smollett's mind; and wooden as it seems to us, and fatuous as we may esteem the writer's treatment of the theory of romance set forth in it, it has a place in the Romantic Revival which is not shared by any book of its time.

IV

Sir Lancelot Greaves.

SMOLLETT'S next novel, *Sir Lancelot Greaves*, was published in 1762: it shows him at his nadir. His next, *Humphry Clinker*, was published nine years after that

[1] The 'Night in a Forest' was long quoted as an example of the Truly-Awful. It is nothing of the kind—now. But there is no doubt that the writer, anticipating the Fat Boy in *Pickwick* by near a century, attempted of set purpose to make his readers' flesh creep; and there is none that he succeeded in his endeavour. Novel also is the figure of the Benevolent Jew, which, however unreal in outline and ungainly in effect, at once passed into literature. As for the Hero-Villain, his descendants are innumerable.

—in 1771 : it shows him at his zenith. Between-whiles he published his translation of *Don Quixote* (1755) and his *History and Adventures of an Atom* (1769). The latter is political and filthy. The former is strenuous but disfeaturing. Where was the novelist Smollett in the meanwhile?

Smollett a practising physician.

The answer is to be found in the circumstances of his career as (1) a would-be practising physician, and (2) a kind of high-class bookseller's hack. In 1750 he was made M.D. by Dalgetty's old *alma mater*, Marischal College, Aberdeen. He is said to have repaired to Bath, and sought, but failed, to work up a practice there. He certainly wrote a treatise on the hygienic, therapeutic, and prophylactic properties of water externally applied; and in this work (1752) he essayed to show that any water would do as well as the waters discovered by King Bladud—which, as Mr. Hannay has remarked, was an odd and very personal way of recommending himself to the inhabitants of Bladud's town. It was all to no purpose : he had not, it would seem, that 'good bedside manner,' in whose absence even Æsculapius were damned; he was impatient of pretence, contemptuous of autho-

rity; in a word, like the tragedy submitted to Mr. Rich by Hogarth's Rake, he would 'not do.' So he gave up the struggle, settled with his wife and daughter at Monmouth House, in Laurence Street, Chelsea, and betook himself to—not literature, as at the start, but—journalism, or the equivalent of journalism, for a living. In 1753 and thereabouts he was pressed for money;[1] for the translation of *Don Quixote*, to which he had perforce to devote his energy and time, had been paid for years before, and the West Indian property suspended payments. But, the Cervantes finished, and these difficulties tided over, he so prospered in his avocation, that for long his income is said to have run as high as £600 to £700 a year. The reason was that, whereas he had created, he was now content to criticise and compile. So far as I know, there is nothing like it in our literary history.[2] The translation of *Don Quixote* was in a sense imaginative;

A bookseller's hack.

[1] In the December of 1754 the stage between London and Chelsea was 'held up,' and Smollett lost his watch and a purse of guineas.

[2] It is inconceivable, of course; but try to conceive of Dickens, after *Nicholas Nickleby*, abandoning fiction, and declining upon the production of small but very personal reviews for the genteel, and the compilation of historical and economical abstracts for the general.

for Smollett, however well or ill he understood his illustrious original[1] essayed in it (or I am mistaken) so to coarsen, so to vulgarise Cervantes, as to exalt him, at any rate in the matter of style, to a level with those notable masters of 'humorous' English, Tom Brown the facetious and the inimitable Ned Ward. However this be, the *Quixote* took its place and had its day, and was duly succeeded (1756) by the seven volumes of a *Compendium of Authentic and Entertaining Voyages digested in a Chronological Sequence*, and by the establishment in the February of the same year of the once famous *Critical Review*.

The Critical Review.

'Written by a Society of Gentlemen,' *The Critical Review* was financed and founded by one Archibald Hamilton,[2] a Scots printer who had quitted Edinburgh for

[1] 'Be a Romance or Farce-writer, raise contributions by another *Regicide*, translate from the French, or *si Dis placet*, murder the Spanish.' Thus Grainger in a certain *Letter* of which we shall hear more. An anonymous *Letter from a Gentleman in the Country to a Friend in Town* (1755), made light of Smollett's Spanish; and Lord Woodhouselee described the translation as a vamp from Jervas.

[2] Hamilton comes in for hard knocks in Smollett's company. Thus, Churchill in *The Apology*:—

> To HAMILTON'S the ready lies repair—
> Ne'er was lie made which was not welcome there—

reasons not unconnected with the Porteous Riots. It was designed to rival that *Monthly Review*, which Ralph Griffiths, Tom Davies's friend, had begun to publish seven years before (1749) at the sign of the Dunciad in St. Paul's Churchyard, and by which he is said to have profited at one time by as much as £2000 a year (*D. N. B.*). From the first it was edited, and largely written, by Smollett; and in 1758 his conduct of it, always high-handed and adventurous, got him into serious trouble. The manner was this. In 1757, acting under Hawke, Admiral Sir Charles Knowles, an experienced but unamiable seaman, and Sir John Mordaunt, an amiable but accomplished soldier, failed in the surprising of Rochefort, and the adventure, which, as Wolfe (he served under Mordaunt) held, should have

> Hence, on maturer judgment's anvil wrought,
> The polished falsehood 's into public brought.
> Quick-circulating slanders mirth afford
> And reputation bleeds in every word.

Thus, too, Cuthbert Shaw, in *The Race* (1766):—

> To clinch the cause, and fuel add to fire,
> Behind came Hamilton, his trusty squire. . . .
> 'Hear my resolve, and first by God I swear,
> By Smollett and his gods, whoe'er shall dare
> With him this day for glorious fame to vie
> Sous'd in the bottom of the ditch shall lie;
> And know, the world no other shall confess,
> While I have crab-tree life, or letterpress.'

profited us hugely, was held mighty dear at a million sterling. Mordaunt was court-martialled and found not guilty. Knowles was only assailed in print and by the public voice; but he was of an acrimonious habit, and he put out a pamphlet[1] setting forth divers reasons why it should be thought that he, Admiral Knowles, was not to blame. This pamphlet was sent to *The Critical Review*; and Smollett, who had known of Knowles since that bad business at Cartagena, where he commanded the *Weymouth*, said plainly that there was nothing in it, and that Knowles's case was never a pin the better for it. The Admiral, being of a different mind, brought an action against the printer, Hamilton, but declared, by the mouth of his counsel, that his sole object in going to law was to discover the writer, to the end that he might demand the satisfaction due to a gentleman and a man of honour. Smollett's behaviour was, as the saying is, 'a little mixed.' To begin with, he wrote to his friend John Wilkes, stating that he 'wished to see the prosecution quashed'; that he would like Wilkes,

Its treatment of Admiral Knowles.

[1] *The Conduct of Admiral Knowles on a late Expedition Set in a True Light.* London: 1758.

with certain 'gentlemen . . . my friends,' to 'talk with those who are supposed to have influence with the Admiral'; and that, 'if the affair cannot be compromised, we intend to kick up a dust, and die hard': that, in short, the 'foolish Admiral' had better hold his peace, and 'not further provoke the resentment of' Mr. Wilkes's 'Very obliged humble servant, T. Smollett.' This could only mean, of course, that Knowles, like Trunnion, must either 'get up and be spliced' with Smollett, by compounding his action, or 'lie still and be d——d' in the eternal enmity of *The Critical Review*. Thus the blackmailer, the tyrant-in-type, in Smollett. The man of honour being every whit as vivacious and as instant, he acknowledged his authorship of the offending article the moment it was question of the arbitrament of arms; when Knowles, as promptly, lodged an action against him, and carried a verdict for a fine of £100 and three months' imprisonment in the King's Bench prison.[1] Smollett, for once entirely in the

[1] Says Walter Scott, and there is none who will disagree with him:—'How the Admiral reconciled his conduct to the rules usually observed by gentlemen, we are not informed; but the proceeding seems to justify even Smollett's strength of expression when he terms him an officer without resolution,

right, and in funds besides, appears to have taken his mischance with excellent temper. He paid his fine, and he served his term; and I doubt not that he presently made the best of his bad bargain in *Sir Lancelot Greaves*.

This, the most serious of Smollett's quarrels, was neither the first one nor the last. He was addicted, as his *Travels* shows, to the *argumentum baculinum*; and in 1753, soon after his establishment in Chelsea, he had applied it in the case of a certain Peter Gordon, with the result that he got the worst in a court of law, besides being grossly insulted (or so he conceived) by the plaintiff's counsel, one Hume Campbell.[1] Five years

The *argumentum baculinum*.

and a man without veracity.' And Mr. Hannay:—'Admiral Knowles seems decidedly to have belonged to the class of naval officers who had to be "encouraged" by the shooting of Admiral Byng.' And so, with an 'unmelodious twang' the Admiral's ghost departs the precincts of this Edition.

[1] According to Smollett, Gordon borrowed money of him, and instead of repaying it, took sanctuary in the rules of Bench, and thence addressed him in insulting messages. As for Hume Campbell, the defendant not only abused him roundly, but challenged him to mortal combat. The letter of challenge, however, never reached its address, and found its way into print as late as 1784, when a rough draft, 'which seems to have been sent to Daniel Mackercher, the Mr. M—— of *Peregrine Pickle*' (HANNAY), appeared in *The European Magazine*. For the rest, Smollett's exasperation was but natural. For one thing, he hated to seem in the wrong; and for another, he was at this time (1753-1756) hard pressed for cash.

Grainger. later (1758), he fell foul of Grainger's translation of Tibullus in the December number of *The Critical Review*. This performance he berated and belittled with much of his wonted pertness;[1] and when Grainger retorted upon him—(which he did, with a great deal of asperity[2] in a long-forgotten *Letter to Tobias Smollett, M.D.*)—Smollett wound up a kind of half-hearted apology[3] for his first article with a denunciation in form. 'Whereas,' he says, 'one of the owls belonging to the proprietor of *The M—thly R——w*, which answers to the name of Grainger, hath suddenly broken from his mew, where he used to hoot in darkness and peace, and now screeches openly in the face of day, we shall take the first opportunity to chastise this troublesome owl, and drive him back to his original obscurity.' The 'first opportunity' occurred no later than Mr. Hamilton's next issue; when the un-

[1] 'Feud,' he says, is a Scotch word, 'redoubtable' a French one; while 'noiseless' is such English as no decent writer would stoop to use. Also, he likens one of Grainger's images to a scene in the Bloody Bowl in Hanging Sword Alley.

[2] Smollett, like his own Matthew Bramble, disliked his first Christian name; and Grainger, who seems to have been at one time known to him, was careful to touch this raw, and to refer to 'Dr. Toby' when and where he could.

[3] *The Critical Review*, January 1759.

happy Grainger—(by the way, as a *Monthly* Reviewer he was naturally incapable of aught but infamy in Smollett's eye)—was fustigated without ruth, yet not wholly to the credit of him that held the rods.[1] Came the turn (1760) of the ridiculous John Hall-Stevenson, whose pretensions to wit and taste and artistry were as savagely exposed

Hall-Stevenson.

[1] Here—premising that 'old women' refers to Mrs. Griffiths, who was supposed to 'edit' her husband's authors—here are some warblings of his muse (*Critical Review*, February 1759):—'. . . Dr. James Grainger, who, for many years, has been endeavouring, in the shade of obscurity, to earn a subsistence . . . who has condescended to piece the compilations of superannuated dulness at the bookseller's lowest price, and even been obliged to pay a printer's journeyman for translating his copy into English . . . Dr. Grainger ought to remember how he was rejected as a writer in a certain Biographical Dictionary; and in what manner he has laboured, as an obscure hireling, in the *Monthly Review*, under the inspection and correction of an illiterate bookseller; who has often declared that he (Grainger) had some learning and taste, but could not write a sentence of English. . . . *The Critical Review* is not written by a parcel of obscure hirelings, under the restraint of a bookseller and his wife, who presume to revise, alter, and amend the articles occasionally. The principal writers in *The Critical Review* are unconnected with booksellers, unawed by old women, and independent of each other. . . . When we hear Dr. Grainger accuse Dr. Smollett of being biased in his integrity by a good dinner, we are inclined to believe that the imputation comes from a hungry belly, when the accuser feels the full force of the temptation. If that was the case, he might have fed himself into better humour without going fifty miles from London. All those

as they deserved to be; and in *A Nosegay and a Simile for the Reviewers*:—

> Ye Overseers and Reviewers
> Of all the Muses and the Sewers,
> Who dwell on high,
> Enthroned among your peers,
> The Gazetteers:—

and the *Two Epistles of Margery the Cook-maid* (1762), that heavy-handed, ineffectual exemplar of pruriency, made bold to tell the *Critical* Reviewers what he, the would-be La Fontaine,[1] was pleased to think of them. Smollett's best opposite was of a

who are acquainted with Dr. Smollett know, that for every dinner he ever received, he has given fifty at least; and that his house is always open to those who have recourse to his hospitality. . . . We dive not into private characters and circumstances with a view to personal abuse: that task we leave to the polite and worthy Dr. James Grainger, and his associates: for, we are informed that all this filth did not flow from the same dunghill. It is a muddy stream supplied from three different reservoirs of dulness and malice. . . . We might expatiate upon the translator's great sagacity in chastening and reforming the tenth elegy, which Tibullus addresses to his catamite. . . .' I will end this note by reporting that, according to Johnson, 'The *Critical* Reviewers often reviewed without reading the books through,' whereas the *Monthly* men, being 'duller fellows,' were glad to read what was asked of them.

[1] He was Yorick's Eugenius—the life-long friend of Sterne. But a more despicable poetaster than this eighteenth-century Yorkshire imitator of the inimitable has rarely put pen to paper.

very different stamp. The truculence, the hardihood, the ferocity inherent in Charles Churchill were equal with his own; and when *The Critical Review* declared that *The Rosciad* (1760) was the work of—not Churchill but—Lloyd and Colman, the satirist fell to his tools, and, in *The Apology* (1761), struck back at his assailant with all the strength of his arm. It is not for me to analyse the performance. I need but note that Churchill is careful to report the fact, or confirm the rumour, of Smollett's jealousy:— Charles Churchill.

> Whence could arise this mighty critic spleen;
> The Muse a trifler, and her theme so mean?
> What had I done that angry Heaven should send
> The bitt'rest foe where most I wish'd a friend?
> Oft hath my tongue been wanton at thy name,
> And hail'd the honours of thy matchless fame.
> For me let hoary FIELDING bite the ground,
> So nobler *Pickle* stands superbly bound.
> From LIVY'S temples tear th' historic crown,
> Which with more justice blooms upon thine own.
> Compar'd with thee be all life-writers dumb
> But he who wrote the *Life of Tommy Thumb.*

Follows that description of *The Regicide* which is cited some pages back; and though, in the rest of *The Apology*, the satirist leaves Smollett alone and deals with the

gang in general, he renews his attack in *The Ghost* (1762) :—

> Some, the more subtle of their race,
> (Who felt some touch of *coward* [1] grace
> Who Tyburn to avoid had wit,
> But never fear'd deserving it)
> Came to their brother SMOLLETT'S aid,
> And carried on the critic trade.

And in *The Author* (1763) he has at his

[1] It was held a special iniquity in the staff of *The Critical Review* that its members were anonymous. Cf. *The Apology* :—

> Conscious of guilt, and fearful of the light,
> They lurk enshrouded in the vale of night ;
> Safe from detection, seize the unwary prey,
> And stab, like bravoes, all who come that way.

And the nameless writer of a certain *Apology Addressed to the Reviewers* (1762), while less explicit, is not less resentful. His Muse, he tells you, is 'Shock'd by the thought of SM-LL-TT'S butch'ring skill,' but he is none the less resolved to unpack his heart about the wicked in the train of one who, 'like PROTEUS-H-LL,' is qualified 'To mangle nature both with pen and pill' :—

> Of CALEDONIAN boors a slavish race,
> At once their country's and their own disgrace ;
> Who, driven by itch and poverty from home,
> Like hungry wolves in search of plunder roam :—

And he pines for the advent of a better and more amiable time, and a more potent hand : —

> Oh ! might he then the glorious cause pursue,
> And bring ye trembling to the public view ;
> Tear ev'ry paltry, mean disguise away,
> And bear your rancour to the blaze of day.

enemy for (so far as I know) the last time:—

> How do I laugh when PUBLIUS, hoary grown
> In zeal for Scotland's welfare, and his own . . .
> Too mean (the worst of curses Heav'n can send)
> To have a foe, too proud to have a friend,
> Erring by form, which blockheads sacred hold,
> Ne'er making new forms, and ne'er mending old:—

and all the rest of it. Smollett declares that it was not he who reviewed *The Rosciad*. Be this the case or not, they were few indeed, if any, who held that Churchill's ink was spilled in vain. For some years Smollett was *The Critical Review*, and *The Critical Review* was Smollett; and there can be no manner of doubt that though he could, and did, apologise upon occasion—as he did to Home and Richardson—it amused him to play the literary huff-snuff, and that he did his hectoring with so much spirit as to make himself cordially detested by a great many of his fellow lieges.[1]

[1] Another reviler was the notorious Shebbeare:—

> The same abusive, base, abandoned thing
> When pilloried or pensioned by a king:—

who hated and despised him as a Scot, and would have none of him as an historian, and whom he flogged at the cart's tail (so to speak) as the Ferret of *Sir Lancelot Greaves*. Yet another was Joseph Reed, the dramatist, whose mock-tragedy,

After 1748, the year of *Roderick Random*, Smollett, Mr. Seccombe tells us, 'became a centre of attraction to the group of able Scotsmen who were now in London, and especially to those of the medical profession, such as Clephane, Macaulay, Hunter, Armstrong, Pitcairne, and Smellie.' There is proof that he remained such a centre of attraction always; but during these later years he was rather notorious than conspicuous. He went not, as the saying is, into society, but lived a life of his own, partly (I take it) because he must, but chiefly (it is evident) because he would, in a little world contrived and ordered by him-

Madrigal and Trulletta, he scouted and scorned in *The Critical Review* for August 1758. To excel in parody and burlesque, he opined, even in 'the highest degree of perfection they are capable of attaining to,' was within the means 'of a very moderate capacity.' Reed, retorting on his 'dear Toby' in *A Sop in the Pan for a Physical Critick* (1759), would not agree to this; declared that none but a fool or a knave would 'publickly assert' that Henry Fielding, author of *Tom Thumb the Great*, was 'of a very moderate capacity'; and in the sequel argued that his critic's contempt for *Madrigal and Trulletta* was inspired by the fact that it included parodies of *The Regicide*. He challenges Smollett to answer him. And, says he victoriously:—'I am afraid your Reply will cut a very indifferent Figure, as you have manifestly exhausted your Vein of Humour in the composition of *Roderick Random*, the best (I was going to add the only tolerable) Piece you have published.'

self, in which there was no king but him. His credentials were of the best; yet he seems never to have had the entry into the Johnson set.[1] He came of a good stock, and could always make a figure; yet the world knew him not, but was content with knowing of him. One reason is, no doubt, that he worked so hard that he left himself little or no leisure. Another, and a stronger, is that he followed his own likings, and was better pleased in a company which he could oblige and domineer than in one wherein he moved on an equal footing with those he met. As it would seem, he set out to make himself a kind of monarch in Grub Street. In 1758, 'Jupiter' Carlyle, who had known him years before,[2] found him in London, and wrote of the Smollett he found. Robertson, the historian, wanted to meet Smollett; Carlyle arranged the meeting; it came off at a coffee-house (Forrest's). So far, so good; but 'he was now become a great man, and, being much of a humourist, was

A monarch in Grub Street.

[1] This, though he is found asking Wilkes's interest in the case of Francis Barker, Johnson's black servant, who had been taken by a press-gang.

[2] During the '45, when Smollett wrote *The Tears of Scotland*, a copy of verses in which he got nearer to poetry than in all the rhymes he ever made.

not to be put out of his way'; and when we—Home and I, and Smith and Robertson ('tis Carlyle that speaks)—arrived at Forrest's, 'he had several of his minions about him, to whom he prescribed tasks of translation, compilation, or abridgement.' Then, 'we dined together, and Smollett was very brilliant.' Then, 'that we might spend the evening together,' he 'begged leave to withdraw for an hour that he might give audience to his myrmidons'; but 'we insisted that it should be in the room in which we sat.' Of course, 'the Doctor agreed,' and some five of the 'myrmidons' were introduced. The Doctor kept two of them to supper, to make sport for his hosts, 'whispering to us' ('tis always Carlyle that speaks) 'that he believed they would amuse us, which they certainly did, for they were very curious characters.' It is pleasing to know that Robertson, who, being a simple-minded man, with no skill in the world's ways, had looked to meet another Pickle, or at least another Random, in Smollett, 'expressed great surprise at the polished and agreeable manners and the great urbanity of his conversation.' Yet another picture of him is found in *Humphry Clinker*, in which,

His meeting with Robertson.

speaking by the mouth of Jerry Melford, he paints himself in the act of playing the host to his 'unfortunate brothers of the quill,' for whom he was at pains to provide a Sunday regale of 'beef, pudding and potatoes, port, punch, and Calvert's entire butt-beer.' 'Tis an amusing and a graphic piece of work, and it shows the Doctor as he wished to be seen—feeding, hectoring, tipping; a kind of *bourru bienfaisant*, ever forward with such jests as only a person in authority can break, and ever ready with a skinfull and a crown-piece for the wretches on whom those jests were broken. This, as I have said, is how he wished to appear and be remembered; yet I know not if it make us like him any the better. Indeed, I have come upon nothing so much to the discredit of Grub Street as that it ate Dr. Toby's dinners and pocketed Dr. Toby's advances at the same time that it endured his benevolence, and pocketed his contempt.[1]

[1] Here, no doubt, in these Chelsea Sundays, is the ground for Smollett's boast to Grainger:—'All those who are acquainted with Dr. Smollett know that for every dinner he has ever received, he has given fifty at least,' *etc.* Mr. Hannay institutes an apt and telling reference to the dinners which Archibald Constable, *teste* John Ballantyne, 'regaled, among others, his own circle of literary serfs,' at Polton, with the

V

Scotland revisited.

WITHAL, these years of quarrelling were the busiest of his busy life. In 1755, the *Don Quixote* off his hands, he revisited Scotland after an absence of sixteen years,[1] and, returning to London, was soon neck-deep into that quag of journey-work—editing, reviewing, writing to order—his preference for which, at the very top of his

very judicious reflection that Smollett describes himself, whom (as we know) he loved and esteemed above all mankind, while the description of the Polton revels is the work of one who did not love the master of them. If it seem a pity—and to many it will—that Smollett saw nothing in his parasites but what he has reported, and left the F. B. and the Shandon, and the Pendennis (even !) of the period unhonoured and unsung, the answer is that Smollett was not Thackeray, and that to him the Grub Street person was merely an occasion for rather savage farce : much as Henry Fielding had been some years before the spunging oddities described by Jerry Melford were come upon the scene.

[1] He found his sister prosperously married to a Mr. Telfer, and his mother staying under her roof at Scotston, Peeblesshire : a small estate which Telfer had been able to buy. It is told of the novelist that he chose to be introduced to Mrs. Smollett as a gentleman who had known her son in the East Indies, and that he remained unrecognised, until he chanced to lose his serious look, when the mother said :—'Your old, roguish smile betrayed you at once.' It is not the prettiest of stories ; but it goes far to show that, outside literature, Smollett had his emotions mighty well in hand.

career, appears, as I have said, to stamp him 'solely singular' among creative artists. In 1756 came his *Compendium of Authentic and Entertaining Voyages*; and in 1757, thanks to the Garrick whom he not so very long before had rotted (there is really no other word) as Mr. Marmozet, he won his way to the stage with *The Reprisal*, a two-act farce, in which, with great dexterity, and a regard for the mint and anise and cummin of the drama which goes far to induce the belief that there was a good cheap playwright lost in him,[1] he took his revenge, once for all, for the shameful betrayal of *The Regicide*. In 1757-58, he published, in four quartos, his *History of England*: a work on which he spent some twenty months, for which he read upwards of three hundred volumes, and for which he pocketed as much as £2000.[2] In 1758-60

Hack-work.

[1] He brings on the stage-Frenchman, the stage-Irishman, the stage-Scotchman, the stage-sailor—above all, the stage-sailor; and he brings them on with undeniable stage-spirit. *The Reprisal*, in short, is said to have held the boards for fifty years, and in the end to have done essential service to the Marryat of *The Three Cutters*.

[2] It was 'followed the next year by a revised edition, published in monthly numbers at the price of one shilling each,' and 'continued to the year 1762, ten years later.'—HANNAY, *Smollett*, p. 125.

he edited the *Modern Part of an Universal History*. In 1761 he started a translation of Voltaire,[1] and contributed to *The British Review*, which he is said to have edited in conjunction with Goldsmith, his fourth and feeblest novel, *The Adventures of Sir Lancelot Greaves*.[2] Then, in 1762-63 (May-February) he edited *The Briton*, a journal established in Bute's interest, which had scarce any circulation, cost him his friendship with Wilkes, and at last died in his hands, in circumstances that left him 'stung, aggravated, and humiliated beyond endurance' (HANNAY). He was in wretched health at the time of this gross and exasperating failure. A sedentary life had told heavily upon him; what he himself described as a *systema nervosum maximé irritabile* had altogether broken up, and he was incurably rheumatic and scorbutic; worst of all, he had been made desperate, it may be almost distraught, by the loss,

[1] 'With Notes Historical and Critical. By Dr. Smollett and Others.' London: 1761-1774. In thirty-eight volumes.

[2] It was published as a serial, and may very well have been the first piece of fiction written in English to that end. Two of Defoe's—*Robinson Crusoe* (First Part) and *Captain Singleton*—had been so published, but both had existed for some time in book form.

early in 1763, of his only child.[1] Nothing was left him but change of air and circumstance and scene; so in the June of the same black year he started for the Riviera and for Italy, and remained abroad until the early spring of 1765. It was a dreary time. When he left England he was a man 'traduced by malice'—(Wilkes's no doubt: the friend whom, in Bute's interest, he had cursed in print by all his gods)—'persecuted by faction, abandoned by false patrons'—(Bute, to wit)—and, above all, 'overwhelmed by the sense of a domestic calamity which it was not in the power of fortune to repair': so he lived angrily, or gloomily, or both, and saw things with a peevish eye, and, for his pains, was dubbed the 'learned Smelfungus' by that brisk young Sentimental Traveller, the Reverend Laurence Sterne.[2]

A journey abroad.

[1] She had come to fifteen, but died, after all, of what is now called tubercle. 'Whom the gods love die young.' Whom the gods love not——!

[2] 'The learned Smelfungus travelled from Boulogne to Paris, from Paris to Rome—and so on;—but he set out with spleen and jaundice, and every object he passed by was discoloured or distorted.—He wrote an account of them, but 'twas nothing but the account of his miserable feelings. . . . I met Smelfungus in the grand portico of the Pantheon;—he was just coming out of it. "'*Tis nothing but a huge cock-pit*," said he . . . "I'll tell it," cried Smelfungus, "to the world." "You had better tell it," said I, "to your physician."'—*A*

What was still worse, his recovery was but partial. For a time he stood to his guns with the old energy, the old fortitude: he wrote and published the sequel to his *History of England*; he wrote (or finished) and published his *Travels through France and Italy*; he lived much at Bath, and paid a lingering last visit to Scotland, where he was acclaimed and welcomed as he deserved, and collected much material for his ripest and soundest book; he, finally, 'cleansed his stuffed bosom of such perilous stuff' as Wilkes, and Bute, and Pitt, and Time, and the Gods, and the *Monthly* Reviewers had choked it withal, by publishing (1769) *The Adventures of an Atom*, in which he hit out all round, bemerded everything and everybody, and satisfied himself, apparently, that there was but one just man alive, and his name—it need scarcely be said—was Tobias George Smollett. That done, he bethought him seriously of himself, for his health was worse than ever, and turned his mind south once more.

He would fain have had an Italian consul-

Sentimental Journey through France and Italy. By Laurence Sterne. Smollett is hard, but not too hard, on the Medicean Venus; but the worst that I can say about him is that, on the whole, his prince of painters seems to be—not Raphael, nor even Titian, but—Guido Reni.

ship. But he was elderly and broken; it was held that he could neither bless nor ban to any purpose now; and, though Hume did all with Shelburne that he could, there was never a consulship for Smollett. So he had even to do without one; and, leaving England in the winter of 1768, and travelling by way of Pisa (where he was visited by Sir Horace Mann) and Lucca, he got as far as Leghorn, and there set up his rest in a villa, with a noble outlook, in the shadow of Monte Nero. Here he drudged out what was due from him to the *Modern Universal History*; and here, despite worsening health and failing strength,[1] he wrote his masterpiece—which is also one of the masterpieces of the English Novel—the excellent *Adventures of Humphry Clinker*.[2] It was

His masterpiece.

[1] His spirit was ever indomitable. 'If,' he writes to John Hunter (Leghorn, January 9, 1771), 'I can prevail upon my wife to execute my last will, you shall receive my poor carcase in a box . . . to be placed among your rarities. I am already so dry and emaciated that I may pass for an Egyptian mummy without any other preparation than some pitch and painted linen; unless you think I may deserve the denomination of a curiosity in my own character, I mean that of your old friend and affectionate humble servant.' It is a brave letter (of its kind), and takes its place, not unhandsomely, with the last utterances of Cervantes and Fielding.

[2] Thus described by Horace Walpole: 'A party novel, written by that profligate hireling, Smollett, to vindicate the Scots, and cry down juries.'

His death. published early in 1771, and in the September of that year the end came. 'All is well, my dear,' he said to his wife, who had nursed and tended him with unfailing affection; and these were his last words. So passed the old stark pagan—the man to whom the world was as it were a great extension of the Bench or the Fleet: 'in which we are all playthings of fortune.' He was buried, within sight of the sea, in the old English cemetery in the Via degl' Eglisi at Leghorn; and three years later, his cousin James set up a 'tall Tuscan column' in his honour on the banks of Leven, with an inscription which had the honour to be rewritten and revised by Dr. Johnson in the course of that tour to the Hebrides which he made, in Mr. Boswell's company, in 1774.[1]

I have said nothing of *Sir Lancelot Greaves* for the simple reason that I find

[1] Had Smollett lived four years more, he would have succeeded to the family estate of Bonhill, which, he being dead, passed to his sister, Jean. His widow appears to have been in receipt of a kind of pension from Bonhill and the Telfers. She lived on at Leghorn, and in 1782 a fire deprived her of the last of her Jamaican property. She appealed to the public; and on March 3rd, 1784, she took a benefit at the Edinburgh Theatre. The play was *Venice Preserved*; the profits amounted to £366. That is the last heard of her.

so little merit in it that I have no more than that to say. Here and there are glimpses of the true Smollett, and Captain Crowe, in other circumstances, and as anything else than a foolish, futile essay in burlesque knight-errantry, could scarce fail to be amusing: even as Sir Lancelot, were he anything but an impossible travesty of Don Quixote might, it is reasonable to suppose, have proved himself a more or less interesting hero. But the initial blunder was Smollett's; and he must pay for it to the end of time. It is other-guess work with *Humphry Clinker*, wherein there is little or nothing, once you admit the scheme, and are prepared to take on all its consequences, that is not excellent. To say that the stinks and nastinesses are done with peculiar gusto is to say that Smollett remained himself until the end; and that, when you leave Bath behind you and have got to Edinburgh, and Mrs. Jenkins is telling you all she knows — that, I say, is to your everlasting entertainment. More: Smollett is no longer the flaunting, swaggering cynic of *Random* and *Pickle*; he is old and kind; above all, he has read *Tristram Shandy*. His characters—Bramble, Tabitha,

Humphry Clinker.

Winifred Jenkins, Humphry, Lismahago—are instantly yet humanely apprehended and incomparably well presented; the humour is ever kindly and sane; there is never a word, much less an adventure, to make you half-sorry in the reading; the Quicklyisms of Winifred and Mrs. Tabitha fall luscious and inevitable, like honey from the comb; in fine, save in the good parts of Dickens, there is no more cheerful, no more diverting reading in English fiction than the good parts of this notable book. It is the only one in which Smollett comes within measurable distance of Fielding; and I do not know that Fielding himself has done anything very much better than Lismahago:[1] Lismahago, the first real Scotsman to plant a foot in English letters; the Adam of a great and ever-multiplying brood! On the whole it is scarce possible, and it might well be held mischievous, to hope for a recrudescence of popularity for *Random* and *Pickle*. But they will long be read, I take it, and read because their author was also the author of *Humphry Clinker*.

[1] The lieutenant, it appears, is doubly beneficent. He is himself, for one thing; and for another (*teste* Walter Scott) he is the spiritual ancestor of Rittmeister Dugald Dalgetty.

VI

SMOLLETT'S chief fault is a certain hard and shameless indelicacy of imagination and perception, which makes it impossible for him to enter deeply or sympathetically into some essentials of human character, and to say anything worth heeding of the niceties of human intercourse. There is no greater ruffian in literature than Roderick Random, unless it be Peregrine Pickle ; yet he started with the notice that in Roderick he would incarnate 'modest merit' ; and in the end he is perfectly satisfied with his results. And Roderick, between the first and last chapters of his history, scarce ever appears excepting as a sharking rascal, who has few other virtues than the very doubtful one of being as free with his own money as he is with other people's, and whose selfishness is of so lusty a type that he is content to reward his faithful Strap with, as Scott said, a cast mistress and a Highland farm. Of this hero's original relations with Miss Williams I forbear to speak : the curious may look into them for themselves. Here I shall but note that there is in them a peculiarity of squalor, an intimate and

Smollett's chief fault.

ineradicable unpleasantness, which make the lady's subsequent connexion with Narcissa one of the unpardonable things in fiction.[1] Nobody minds, however, in the book; and as Narcissa herself is moved to distinguish 'modest merit' in a footman's habit, one may infer that Narcissa, did she know, would mind as little as Miss Williams does, or Roderick, or the common author of their being. And this same indelicacy is of the very stuff of Smollett's mind. You would say that, thanks to his Scots breeding, or his professional training, or both, he had neither sense of privacy nor olfactory nerves. More: he is indecent naturally, yet deliberately: indecent because he must be, but also because he will. People talk and write about the 'cynicism' of Thackeray. If they want the real thing—(but they don't)—let them look for it in the Smollett of *Random* and *Pickle*. They will find more in a single character of the earlier artist's—his Crabtree, say—than there is in all the sentimental carpings of the Middle-Victorian moralist; and they will think

[1] I open a parenthesis to note, in passing, that in these days Miss Williams would pretty certainly behave in the manner of the Second Mrs. Tanqueray.

better of their Thackeray than they have ever thought before.

His master-quality.

I have said what I believe to be the worst that can be said of Smollett. Now for the other side. He has—and I take it to be his master-quality—a peculiar power of realising a character, not by description and analysis but, out of the character's own mouth. He sees his people mostly as personages in a farce; but he knows all he wants you to know about them from the beginning, and with three strokes of his pen he makes you also know it. His Morgan, for instance: is it possible to forget that first appearance in the surgeon's berth of H.M.S. *Thunder*? It is all over in no time (so to say); yet, once and forever, there is Morgan. It is the same, in a greater or less degree, with Weazle and Miss Ramper, with Narcissa's aunt and Pipes and Hatchway, with Jack Rattlin and Oakum and Mrs. Trunnion-Hatchway, with Potion and Crab and Lavement, with Winifred Jenkins and Tabitha Bramble and Jackson: in fact, with almost any one of the many whom their author deigns to individualise. And when he goes deeper—when he is interested enough to be intimate—then you get crea-

tions like Bowling and Trunnion, like Lismahago and Matthew Bramble, like Pipes and Strap; and with these you are well into literature. And his narrative is of the same instant, peremptory type. He writes good, nervous forth-right English; knows exactly what he wants to say; and says it exactly as he means it to be said: as, to take three very different examples, the story of Random and Strap in London, the 'Night in the Forest' episode in *Fathom*, and that unparalleled digression concerning Pipes and the beggar maid, which does so much to reconcile one with the ostentatious blackguardism of *Pickle*—as these, I say, exist to show. Comes in the last instance, Smollett the humourist—hard and immodest but copious and authentic, if in the main inalterably farcical; and, as I think, the secret of the perennial popularity of some (at least) of him lies open, even to him that runs and reads.

Says Mr. Raleigh,[1] finally:—'His zest in life is real and infectious, and his purely external treatment gives a certain refreshing quality to his pages; over his books at least it is possible to "unbend the mind."' That,

[1] *The English Novel*, p. 189.

if our standard be that of great literature, is good enough for Smollett; and I know not if there be more to say about him. But literature is not all great; and outside the pleasaunce, where Fielding ironises with Cervantes, and Shakespeare discusses an intonation with Dickens, while Scott and Thackeray pause in their talk to hear what 's said, and Sterne reads Trim and Toby and 'My Father' into them all—outside, I say, the scene of these august familiarities there is honourable room for Smollett. For, take it how you will, he anglicised Le Sage, and so was one ancestor of *Pickwick*; he created Pipes and Trunnion and Bowling, and in this wise cleared the way for Chucks, and Mesty, and O'Brien—to name but these; in *Ferdinand Count Fathom* he struck a note and suggested a set of possibilities with which romance yet thrills; he was the first (so far as I can find) to write a novel for publication in serial form, and herein he has had some forty thousand imitators; finally, he was beloved of the boy Dickens, who remembered and imitated him, and so he takes hands with one of the greatest in English Letters. One may like him or not; but one has to admit that he builded better

An ancestor of *Pickwick*.

than, with all his full-sailed vanity, he knew, and, at the worst, was full of most excellent differences: that, in so many words, English literature would have been appreciably the poorer, if 'Dr. Toby' had not lived and worked.

WILLIAM HAZLITT

His descent.

HAZLITT'S father, a minister in the Unitarian Church, was the son of an Antrim dissenter, who had removed to Tipperary; Hazlitt's mother was the daughter of a Cambridgeshire yeoman; so that there is small room for wonder if Hazlitt were all his life distinguished by a fine pugnaciousness of mind, a fiery courage, an excellent doggedness of temper, and (not to crack the wind of the poor metaphor) a brilliancy in the use of his hands unequalled in his time, and since his time, by any writing Englishman. Of course, he was very much else; or this monument[1] to his genius would scarce be building, this draft to his credit would have been drawn for To-Morrow on To-Day. But, while he lived, his fighting talent was the sole thing in his various and splendid gift that was evident to the powers that were; and, inasmuch as he loved nothing

His fighting talent.

[1] The monument is the edition published by Mr. Dent (1902-4), to which this Essay served as an introduction.

so dearly as asserting himself to the disadvantage of certain superstitions which the said powers esteemed the very stuff of life, they did their utmost to dissemble his uncommon merits, and to present him to the world at large as a person whose morals were deplorable, whose nose was pimpled, whose mind was lewd, whose character would no more bear inspection than his English, whose heart and soul and taste were irremediable, and who, as he persisted in regarding 'the Corsican fiend' as a culmination of human genius and character, must for that reason especially—(but there were many others)—be execrated as a public enemy, and stuck in the pillory whenever, in the black malice of his corrupt and poisonous heart, he sought, by feigning an affection for Shakespeare, or an interest in metaphysics, to recommend his vulgar, mean, pernicious personality to the attention of a loyal, God-fearing, church-going, tax-paying, Pope-and-Pretender-hating British Public. I cannot say that I regret the very scandalous attacks that were made on Hazlitt: since, if they had not been, we should have lacked some admirable pages in the *Political Essays* and *The Spirit of the Age*, nor should we now be privileged to rejoice in the dignified and splendid

savagery of the *Letter to William Gifford*. And, if I do not regret them for myself and the many who think with me, still less can I wish them wanting for Hazlitt's sake; for if they had been, who shall say how dull and how profitless, how weary and flat and stale, some years of what he described, in his last words to his kind, as 'a happy life'—how mean and beggarly may not some days in these years have seemed? But there is, after all, a reason for being rather sorry than not that Hazlitt's polemic was so brilliant, his young conviction so unalterably constant, his example so detestable as it seemed to the magnificent ruffian in *Blackwood* and the infinitely spiteful underling in *The Quarterly*. The British Public of those days was a good, hard-hitting, hard-drinking, hard-living lot; and, in the matter of letters, there was no guile in it. It read its Campbell, its Rogers, its Moore, its Hook and Egan and Jon Bee; it accepted its convinced and pedantic sycophant in Southey, its gay, light-hearted protestant in Leigh Hunt; it nibbled at its Wordsworth, knew not what to make of its Coleridge, swallowed its Cobbett (that prince of pugilists) as its morning rasher and toast; it made much of Hone, yet was far from contemptuous of

The Public of those days.

Westmacott; it laid itself open to its Scott and its Byron, Michael and Satan, the Angel of Acceptance and the Angel of Revolt. Withal it was essentially a Tory Public: a public long practised in fearing God and honouring the King; with half an ear for Major Cartwright and his like, and a whole mind for the story of Randall and Cribb; honestly and jovially proud of Nelson and 'The Duke,' but neither loving the Emperor nor seeking to understand him. Now, to Hazlitt the Revolution was humanity *in excelsis*, while the Emperor, being democracy incarnate, and so a complete expression of character and human genius, was as his god. Gifford, then, and Wilson, had small difficulty in blasting Hazlitt's fame, and in so far ruining Hazlitt's chance that 'tis but now, after some seventy years, that he takes his place in literary history as the hero of a Complete Edition. In the meanwhile he has had praise, and praise again. But it has come ever from the few, and he has yet to be considered of the general as a critic of many elements in human activity, a master of his mother-tongue, and one, and that one not the least, in an epoch illustrious in the achievement of Keats and Shelley and

Wordsworth, the inimitable Cobbett, Byron and Sir Walter, Coleridge, the Arch-Potency (who, 'prone on the flood' of failure, ever 'lies floating many a rood'), and the thrice-beloved Lamb.

I

THE elder Hazlitt was trained in Glasgow. A man of spirit and understanding, an active and a vigilant minister, he married Grace Loftus, the Wisbech yeoman's daughter, in 1766; and in 1778 (he being much older than she), the last of their children, their son William, was born to them at Maidstone. Five years later this son accompanied his parents to Philadelphia. There the elder Hazlitt preached and lectured for some fifteen months; but in 1786-87, having meanwhile established the earliest Unitarian church in America, he returned to England, and settled at Wem, in Shropshire, which was practically Hazlitt's first taste of native earth. A precocious youngster, well grounded by his father, himself a man of parts and reading,[1] he was responsible as early as 1792

His birth and childhood.

[1] Hazlitt has glanced at him in his notes on dissenters and dissent in the *Political Essays*, and has given a further taste of him in that very notable and gracious piece, 'My First Acquaintance with Poets.'

for a *New Theory of Criminal and Civil Jurisprudence*, and at fifteen he went to the Unitarian College at Hackney, there to study for the ministry. But his mind changed. In the meantime he learned something of literature, something of metaphysics, something of painting, something (I doubt not) of life; the Revolution blazed out, Bonaparte fell falconwise upon Austrian Italy, and approved himself the greatest captain since Marlborough; there was a strong unrest in time and the destiny of man; the ambitions of life were changed, the possibilities and conditions of life transformed. The skies thrilled with the dawn of a new day, and Hazlitt: already, it is fair to conjecture, at grips with that potent and implacable devil of sex which possessed him so vigorously for so many years; already, too, the devout and militant Radical, the fanatic of Bonaparte, he remained till the end: was no longer for the pulpit. And at this moment existence was transfigured for him also. In the January of 1798, Coleridge, that embodied Inspiration, visited the elder Hazlitt at Wem, and preached his last (Unitarian) sermon in the chapel there. He was at his best, his freshest, his most copious,

His meeting with Coleridge.

his most expressive and persuasive; he had the poet's eye, the poet's mouth, the poet's voice, impulse, authority, style; he had already 'fed on honey-dew, and drunk the milk of Paradise'; and he carried Hazlitt clean off his legs. To the sombre, personal, scarce lettered but very thoughtful youth this voluble and affecting Apparition was the bearer of a revelation. He listened to Coleridge as to a John Baptist. He dared to talk metaphysics, and was so far rewarded for his valour as to be encouraged to persevere.[1] What was of vastly greater importance, he was asked to Stowey in the spring of the same year: an event from which he dated the true beginnings of his intellectual life.

In that centre of enchantment he stayed three weeks. It was a Golden Year. Hazlitt was drunk throughout with what I should like to call Neophytism. Coleridge

A golden year.

[1] In 1805 he produced his essay on the Principles of Human Action. Being no metaphysician, I have never read this work; but Mr. Leslie Stephen, who is a very competent person in these matters, I am told, assures me (*D. N. B.*) that it is 'scrupulously dry,' though 'showing great acuteness.' This, I take leave to say—this is Hazlitt all over. None has written of the workaday elements in life and time with a rarer taste, a finer relish, a stronger confidence in himself and them. Yet, in dealing with absolutes in life and time, he is 'scrupulously dry.' This, I take it, is to be a man of letters.

was magnificent—elusive, archimagian, irresistible; Wordsworth was opinionated but sublime; at intervals, as in Sir Richard Burton's *Thousand Nights and a Night*, they 'repeated the following verses.' It was a time—O, but it was a time! A time of ecstasy: 'When proud-pied April was in all his trim,' and even 'heavy Saturn' must have laughed, if only to keep his yoke-fellow, Wordsworth, in company; Wordsworth with his thick airs, and his luminous Belt, and his dull but steady-going group of Moons! A time of gold, I say; yet had it a most strange outcome. In 1798 Coleridge and Wordsworth were Revolutionaries in everything: they looked to France for liberty, for change, for a shining and enduring example. Hazlitt was with them now and here: his also was a revolutionary soul, he also was of a mind with Danton, he also looked to France for leading and light, he also held the assault delivered upon France for an assault against Freedom. But Coleridge and Wordsworth changed their minds, and readjusted their points of view; and he did not. They loved not Bonaparte; and he did. And the end of it was that, so far as I know, he never wrote with so ripe and

sensual a gust: not even, to my mind, when he was merely annihilating Gifford: as when, long years after Nether-Stowey, he broke in upon the strong, solid hold of Wordsworth's egotism, and tore to tatters—tatters which he flung upon the wind—the old, greasy prophet's mantle,[1] which Coleridge had sported to so little purpose for so many years. To Hazlitt, the dissenter born, the deeply brooding, the inflexible—to Hazlitt, I say, these Twin-Stars of the Romantic Movement were common turn-coats; and he dealt with them on occasion as he thought fit. But he never lost his interest in them; and when it comes to a comparison between Wordsworth, the renegade, and Byron, the leader of storming-parties, the captain of forlorn-hopes, then is his idiosyncrasy revealed. He hacks and stabs, he jibes and sneers and denies, till there is no Byron left, and the sole poet of the century is the 'gentlemanly creature—reads nothing but his own poetry, I believe,'—whose best passages, in a moment of supreme geniality, he once likened, not to their advantage, to those of 'the classic Akenside.'

Disillusion.

[1] Or rather bedgown: unction-soiled and laudanum-stained.

II

IT was from Nether-Stowey that Hazlitt dated his regard for poetry. But if literature came late to him, as (his father's office and his own metaphysical inklings aiding) it did, he ever cherished a pure and ardent passion for it, once it had come. Yet he was by no means widely read, and in his last years seldom finished a new book. First and last, indeed, he was a man of few books and fewer authors. Shakespeare, Burke, Cervantes, Rabelais, Milton, the *Decameron*, the *Nouvelle Héloïse* and the *Confessions*, Richardson's epics of the parlour and Fielding's epics of the road—these things and their kind he read intensely; and, when it pleased him to speak of them, it was ever in the terms of understanding and regard. Yet it was long ere he had any thought of writing; and it was necessity alone that made him a man of letters. In the beginning, the Pulpit proving impossible, he turned to painting for a career, and, after certain studies, presumably under his elder brother John,[1] and possibly under Northcote, he

A man of few books.

[1] John Hazlitt had been a pupil of Reynolds, and his miniatures were welcome at the Academy.

went to the Paris of the First Consul, and painted there for some four months in a Louvre which the thrift of Bonaparte had stored with the choicest plunder in Italian Art. I know not whether or no he could ever have been a painter. Haydon, who neither loved nor understood him, and was, besides, a man who could greatly dare and 'toil terribly'—Haydon says that he was at once too lazy and too timid ever to succeed in painting: an art in which, as Haydon showed, and as Millet was presently to say, 'You must flay yourself alive, and give your skin.'[1] I do not think that Hazlitt was daunted by what may be called the painfulness of painting; for in letters he was soon enough to prove that he had in him to face a world in arms, and to tincture his writings, if need were, with the best blood of his heart. In any case, after divers essays at copying in the Louvre,[2] and certain attempts at portraiture on his return to England,[3] he found

A Painter.

[1] Dans l'art il faut donner sa peau.

[2] He had a painter in him, whether imperfectly developed or not; for he would condescend upon none but Guido, Raphael, Titian.

[3] One was a likeness of his father, of which he has written in eloquent and engaging terms; another, a *Wordsworth*, which he destroyed; a third, the picture of Elia, 'as a Venetian senator,' now in the National Portrait Gallery; yet

that he could not excel; that, in fact, he was neither Titian nor Rembrandt, nor could he even be Sir Joshua. So he painted no more, but went on *reading* certain painters: very much, I assume, as he went on taking certain authors; because he loved them for themselves, and found emotions—and not only emotions, but sensations [1]—in them.

Art criticism.

His ideals are Claude, Rembrandt, Raphael, Poussin, Titian; he gives you very gentlemanly and intelligent estimates of Watteau and Velasquez; he has an eye—a right one

another, the presentment of an Old Woman, which is likened to a Rembrandt. Having seen none of these things, all I can say about them is that Hazlitt seems to have been passionately interested in colour; that he loved a picture because it was a piece of painting; and, if he knew not always bad (or rather third and fourth rate) work when he saw it, was as contemptuous of it, when he realised its status, as Fuseli himself.

[1] There is an immense, even an insuperable difference between the two sorts of sensualists. To take an immediate instance: Lamb loved Hogarth, and found emotions in him, because he (Hogarth) was a novelist in paint; while Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne* touched his sense of letters, and, as Mr. Ainger has noted, suggested to him so much literature, or, at all events, so many literary possibilities, that Titian could not but be an arch-painter. Hazlitt felt his painter first, and thought not of the man-of-letters in his painter till his interest in his painter's painting was—I won't say extinguished but—allayed.

—for Rubens and Van Dyck; he exults in Jan Steen, has words of worth for Ruysdael and Hobbima, and gives Turner as neat a *croc-en-jambe* as you could wish to see. But, despite his training and his gift, he is no more in advance of his age than the best of us here and now. To him the Carraccis and Salvator are *sommités* of a kind; if, so far as I remember, he will have nought to do with Carlo Dolci, he will not do without his Guido; I have read no word of his on Lawrence, no word of his on Constable, none on Morland; on Hogarth he is chiefly literary, on Turner not much more than diabolically ingenious. Wisely or not, he took pictures as he took books: they might be few, but they must be good; and, not only good but, of (as he believed) the best. If they were not, or if they were new, he drew them not to his heart, nor adorned the chambers of his mind with them. Those chambers were filled with good things long since done. To him, then, what were the best things doing? It was his habit to take the good thing on; savour its excellences to their last sucket; meditate it strictly, jealously, privily, longingly; say, if it must be so, a last few words about it—some for

the painter, more for the man of letters;[1] and then . . . ? Well, then he accepted the situation. I do not know that he cared much for Keats; I do know that he found Shelley impossible, that he was never an exalted Wordsworthian, and that he hesitated—(ever so little, but he hesitated!)—even at Charles Lamb. Politics and all, in truth, he was a prophet who adored the past, and had but an infidel eye for the promise of the years. He was interested only in the highest achievement; and to be the highest even that must lie behind him. Thus, Fielding was good, and Rubens; Sir Joshua was good, and so were Richardson and Smollett; so, likewise, Shakespeare was good, and Raphael and Titian were good—these with Milton and Rembrandt, and Burke and Rousseau and Boccaccio; and it was well. Well with them, and well—especially well!—with him: they had achieved, and here was he, the perfect lover, to whom their achievement was as an enchanted

A lover of the past.

[1] 'The point in debate,' he says, 'the worth or the bad quality of the painting . . . I am as well able to decide upon as any who ever brandished a palette.' I doubt not that he spoke the truth; yet the residuum of his criticisms of pictures, their after-taste, is mostly literary. And, as he was finally a man of letters, what else could one expect?

garden, a Prospero's Island abounding in romantic and inspiring chances, unending marvels, miracles of vision and solace and pure, perennial delight. And if these, the 'Thrones, Dominations, Powers,' had done their work, and were venerable in it, so also in their degrees and sorts had Congreve and Watteau, Sir Thomas Browne and Sir Anthony Van Dyck, Wycherley and Jordaens; so had even Salvator and John Buncle. In dealing with painters, and with purely painters' pictures, Hazlitt generally strikes a right note.[1] But the man of letters in him is inevitably first; and 'tis not insignificant that some of the 'crack passages' in his writings about pictures are rhapsodies about places—Burleigh or Oxford—or pieces of pure literature like that very human and ingenious essay 'On the Pleasures of Painting,' which is one of the best good things in *Table Talk*.

[1] Leigh Hunt said that he was the best art critic that ever lived: that to read him was like seeing a picture through stained glass, and so forth. But Leigh Hunt knew not much more about pictures than Coleridge knew about the books he talked of, but had not read.

III

SO Hazlitt the painter was gathered to his fathers, and in his stead a Hazlitt reigned about whom the world knows little worth the telling: a Hazlitt who abridged philosophers, and made grammars, and compiled anthologies; a married and domesticated Hazlitt; a Hazlitt with a son and heir, and a wife who seems to have cared as little for his works and him as, in the long run, he assuredly cared for her company and her. The lady's name was Stoddart; she was a brisk, inconsequent, unsexual sort of person —a friend of Mary Lamb; and, like the only Mrs. Pecksniff, 'she had a small property.' It was situate at Winterslow, certain miles from Salisbury, and Hazlitt, who loved the neighbourhood, and clung to it till the end, has so far illustrated the name that, if there could ever be a Hazlitt Cult, the place would instantly become a shrine. It was a cottage, within easy walking distance of Wilton and Stonehenge; and in 1812 the Hazlitts, who were made one in 1808, departed it—it and the well-beloved woods of Norman Court—

Winterslow.

for 19 York Street, Westminster.[1] Hence it was that he issued to deliver his first course of lectures;[2] and here it was that he entertained those friends he had, made himself a reputation by writing in papers and magazines, drank hard, and cured himself of drinking, and long ere the end came found his wife insufferable. In the beginning he worked in the Reporters' Gallery, where he made notes (in long hand) for *The Morning Chronicle*, and learned to take more liquor than was good for him.[3] In this same journal he printed some of his best political work, and broke ground as a critic of acting; and

The Morning Chronicle.

[1] The house had been the abode of Milton; for certain months it had harboured the eminent James Mill; it belonged to the celebrated Jeremy Bentham: so that in the matter of associations Hazlitt, a thorough-paced dissenter, was as well off as he could hope to be.

[2] Ten in number: on 'The Rise and Progress of Modern Philosophy,' as illustrated in the works of Hobbes, Locke and his followers, Hartley, Helvétius, and others. The lectures, Mr. Stephen says, were in part a reproduction of the *Principles of Human Action.*

[3] Haydon says that Waterloo made him drunk for weeks. Then he pulled himself together, and for the rest of his life drank nothing but strong tea. He had, however, no sort of sympathy with those who held the 'social glass' to be Man's safest introduction to the Pit. He only said that liquor did not agree with him, and looked on cheerfully while his friends —Lamb was as close as any—drank as they pleased.

he left it only because he could not help quarrelling with its proprietors.

Journalism and Literature.

Another stand-by of his was *The Champion*, to his work in which he owed a not unprofitable connexion with *The Edinburgh*; yet another, *The Examiner*, to which, with much dramatic criticism, he contributed, at Leigh Hunt's suggestion, the set of essays reprinted as *The Round Table*, and in which he may therefore be said to have discovered his avocation, and given the measure of his best quality. Then, in 1817, he published his *Characters of Shakespeare*, which he dedicated to Charles Lamb; in 1818 he reprinted a series of lectures (at the Surrey Institute) on the English poets;[1] in 1819-20 he delivered from the same platform two courses more—on the Comic Writers and the Age of Elizabeth. He wrote for *The Liberal*, *The Yellow Dwarf*, *The London Magazine*—

[1] Both the *Characters* and the *English Poets* were reviewed by Gifford in the *Quarterly*. The style of these 'reviews' is abject; the inspiration venal; the matter the very dirt of the mind. Gifford hated Hazlitt for his politics, and set out to wither Hazlitt's repute as a man of letters. For the tremendous reprisal with which he was visited, the reader is referred to the *Letter to William Gifford, Esq.* If he find it over-savage: probably, being of to-day, he will: let him turn to his *Quarterly*, and consider, if he have the stomach, Gifford and the matter of offence.

(to which he may very well have introduced the unknown Elia)—*Colburn's New Monthly*; he returned to the *Chronicle* in 1824; in 1825 he published *The Spirit of the Age*, in 1826 *The Plain Speaker*, the *Boswell Redivivus* in 1827; and in this last year he set to work, at Winterslow, on a life of Napoleon. That was the beginning of the end. He had no turn for history, nor none for research; his methods were personal, his results singular and brief; he was as it were an accidental writer, whose true material was in himself. His health broke, and worsened; his publishers went bankrupt; he lost the best part of the £500 which he had hoped to earn by his work; and though, consulting none but anti-English authorities, he lived to complete a book containing much strong thinking and not a few striking passages, it was a thing foredoomed to failure: a matter in which the nation, still hating its tremendous enemy, and still rejoicing in the man and the battle which had brought him to the ground, would not, and could not take an interest. Two volumes were published in 1828 (Sir Walter's *Napoleon* appeared in 1827), and two more in 1830; but the work of writing them

The Life of Napoleon.

His death. killed the writer.[1] His digestion, always feeble, was ruined; and in the September of 1830 he died. He was largely, I should say, a sacrifice to tea, which he drank, in vast quantities, of extraordinary strength. However this be, his ending was (as he 'd have loved to put it) 'as a Chrissom child's.'[2]

IV

THUS much, thus all-too little, of his course in print. For his life, despite his many 'bursts of confidence,' the admissions of his grandson, and the discoveries of such friends as Patmore, the half of it, I think, has to be told to us. This was not his fault, for he was in no sense secretive:

[1] He lived to rejoice in the Revolution of July; but of the great movement in the arts—of *Henri Trois et sa Cour* and *Hernani*, of Delacroix and Barye, of Géricault and Bonington and de Vigny, and the rest of its heroes—he seems to have known nothing. That was his way. The new did not exist for him. A dissenter by birth and conviction, he yet cared only for the past, and the elder 'glories of our blood and state' were to him, not shadows but, the sole substantial things he could keep room for in the kingdom of his mind.

[2] 'Tis a pleasure to remember that Lamb was with him to the end—was in his death-chamber in the very article of mortality. We have all read Carlyle on Lamb. The everlasting pity is that we shall never read Hazlitt on Carlyle.

he would no more lie about himself than he would lie about Southey or Gifford. His trick of drinking was, while it lasted, public; he proclaimed with all his lungs his frank and full approval of the fundamentals of the Revolution and his preference of Bonaparte before all the Kings in Europe; he despised Shelley the politician, and rejected Shelley the poet, and he cherished and made the most he could of his resentment against Coleridge and Wordsworth, though his disdain for concealment perilled his friendship with Lamb, and well nigh cost him the far more facile regard of Leigh Hunt; while, as for Byron, he so bitterly resented the 'noble Lord's' pre-eminency that he made no difference, strongly as he contemned the Laureate, between the Laureate's *Vision of Judgment*, a piece of English verse immortal by the sheer force of its absurdity, and that other *Vision of Judgment*, which is one of the great things in English poetry. 'Twas much the same in life. Poor Mrs. Hazlitt, though she was well-read, of no account as an housekeeper, 'fond of incongruous finery,' and capable of child-bearing withal, was, one may take for granted, not distinguished as a woman. Now, her husband, thinker as

His candour.

he approved himself, was very much of a male. Who runs may read of his early loves—Miss Railton and the rest; 'tis history—at any rate 'tis history according to Wordsworth[1]—that once, in Lakeland, he so dealt with the local beauty that he came very near to tasting of the local pond; when Patmore walked home with him to Westminster, after his first lecture in the Surrey Institute, the wayside nymphs flocked to his encounter, and—(so Patmore says)—he knew them all;[2] he has himself recorded the confession that in the matter of mob-caps and black stockings and red elbows—in fact, on the score of your maid-servant—he could flourish a list as long, or thereabouts, as Leporello's. I know not whether he lied or spoke the truth;[3] but I can scarce believe that he lied. I should rather opine that on this point, as on others, Hazlitt, a gross and extravagant admirer (be it remembered) of J.-J. Rousseau, was, and is, entirely credible. We may take it that his

[1] Him Shelley calls 'a solemn and unsexual man.'

[2] Much as years afterwards, according to a certain Nicolardot, the expertest of their kind were 'on the list' of old Ste.-Beuve.

[3] His grandson describes him as 'physically incapable' of any but a transient fidelity to anybody.

veracity is beyond reproach. But 'tis another matter with his taste; and for that I can say no more than that I have listened to so many confidences:

> From some we loved, the loveliest and the best
> That from his Vintage rolling Time has pressed:

that I hold it for merely unessential.

But the man who habitually hugs his housemaid is, whether he boast of it or not, no more superior to consequences than another: especially if he have, as Hazlitt had, an ardent imagination and a teeming waste of sentiment. And so Hazlitt found. About 1819 he ceased from consorting with his wife; and in 1820 he lodged with a tailor, one Walker, in Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane. Walker, a most respectable man, had daughters, and one of these, a girl well broken-in, it would seem, to the ways of 'gentlemen'—a girl with a dull eye, a 'sinuous gait,' and a habit of sitting on the knees of 'gentlemen'; a girl, in fine, who is only to be described by an old and sane and homely but unquotable designation—this poor half-harlot took on our Don Juan of the area, and brought him to utter grief. He looked at passion, as embodied in Sarah

Sarah Walker.

Walker, until it grew to be the world to him; he went about like a man drunken and dazed, telling the story of his slighted love to anybody that would listen to it;[1] now he raved and was rampant, now was he soul-stricken and heart-broken; he swore he'd marry Walker whether she would or not, and to this end he persuaded his wife to follow him to Edinburgh, and there divorce him—*pour cause*, as the lady and her legal adviser had every reason to believe;[2] and having achieved a divorce, which was no divorce in law, and been finally refused by the young woman in Southampton Buildings, he set to work assiduously to coin his madness into drachmas, and wrote, always with Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his eye, the *Liber Amoris*. It is a book by no means bad—if you can at all away with it. Indeed, it is unique in English, and the

Liber Amoris.

[1] He confessed that one day he told it half a dozen times or so to persons he had never seen before: once, twice over to the same listener.

[2] It cost Hazlitt a crown, perhaps less; and he arranged—apparently with Mrs. Hazlitt—to be taken in the act! After this the knowledge that Mr. and Mrs. Hazlitt took tea together, *pendente lite*, and that then and after his second espousals Hazlitt supplied this very reasonable woman with money, astonishes no more, but comes as a kind of anti-climax.

hundred guineas Hazlitt got for it were uncommonly well earned. But to away with it at all—that is the difficulty; and, as it varies with the temperaments of them that read the book, I shall discourse no more of it, but content myself with noting that, in writing the *Liber Amoris*, Hazlitt wrote off Sarah Walker.[1] He had been in love with a housemaid, but he had been very much more in love with his love; and, having wearied all he knew with descriptions of his feelings, he wrote those feelings down, cleared his system, and became himself again. 'Twas Goethe's way, I believe—his and many another's; the world will scarce get disaccustomed to it while there are women and writing men. What distinguishes Hazlitt from a whole wilderness of self-chroniclers is the fulness of his revelation. It is extraordinary; but, even so, Rousseau had shown him the way. And perhaps the simple truth about the *Liber* is that it is the best Rousseau —the best and the nearest to the *Confessions* —done since Rousseau died.

Sarah Hazlitt married no more; but her

[1] That damsel presently married in her station. She seems to have been a decent woman according to her lights, and to have lived up honestly to her ideals, such as they were.

His second marriage.

husband did. In 1824 he took to wife a certain Mrs. Bridgewater. She was Scots by birth, had lived much abroad, had married and buried a Colonel Bridgewater, was of excellent repute, and had about £300 a year; and with her new husband and his son by Sarah Stoddart—(who had an idea that his mother had been wronged, and seems to have been a most uncomfortable travelling companion)—she toured it awhile in France and Italy. On the return journey the Hazlitts left her in Paris; and when the elder, writing from London, asked her when she purposed to come home to him, she replied that she did not purpose to come home to him: that, in fact, she had done with him, and he would see her no more. So far as I know, he never did; so that, as his grandson says, this second marriage was but 'an episode.' Apparently it was the last in his life; for neither Mrs. Hazlitt attended him in his mortal illness, nor was there any woman at his bed's head when he passed.

V

His aspect and character.

IT is told of him that he was dark-eyed and dark-haired, slim in figure, rather slovenly in his habit; that he valued himself on his effect in evening dress; that his manners were rather ceremonious than easy; that he had a wonderfully eloquent face, with a mouth as expressive as Kean's, and a frown like the Giaour's own [1]—that Giaour whom he did not love. He worshipped women, but was awkward and afraid with them; he played a good game of fives, and would walk his forty to fifty miles a day; he would lie abed till two in the afternoon, then rise, dally with his breakfast until eight without ever moving from his tea-pot and his chair, and go to a theatre, a bite at the Southampton, and talk till two in the morning.[2] That he excelled in talk is beyond all doubt. Witness after witness is here to his wit, his insight, his grip on essentials, his

[1] There was a laughing devil in his sneer
That raised emotions both of rage and fear;
And where his frown of hatred darkly fell,
Hope, withering, fled—and Mercy sighed farewell.

[2] These details are Patmore's, and, even if they be true, are not the whole truth. Hazlitt loved solitude and the country, had to write for a living, wrote with difficulty, and left no inconsiderable body of work.

beautiful trick of paradox, his brilliancy in attack, his desperate defence, his varying, far-glancing, inextinguishable capacity for expression. And he was himself—Hazlitt: a man who borrowed nobody's methods, set no limits to the field of discussion, nor made other men wonder if this were no talk but a lecture. He bore no likeness to that 'great but useless genius,' Coleridge: who, beginning well as few begin, lived ever after 'on the sound of his own voice'; none to Wordsworth, whose most inspiring theme was his own poetry; none to Sheridan, who 'never oped his mouth but out there flew' a jest; none to Lamb, who—— But no; I cannot imagine Lamb in talk. Hazlitt himself has plucked out only a tag or two of Lamb's mystery; and I own that, even in the presence of the notes in which he sets down Lamb as Lamb was to his intimates, I am divided in appreciation between the pair. Lamb for the unexpected, the incongruous, the profound, the jest that bred seriousness, the pun that was that and a light upon dark places, a touch of the dread, the all-disclosing Selene, besides; Hazlitt for none of these but for himself; and what that was I have tried to show. Well; Lamb, Cole-

Lamb and Hazlitt.

ridge, Sheridan, Hazlitt, Hunt, Wordsworth —all are dead, tall men of their tongues as they were. And dead is Burke, and Fox is dead, and Byron, most quizzical of lords! And of them all there is nothing left but their published work; and of those that have told us most about some of them, 'in their habit as they lived,' the best and the strictest-seeing, the most eloquent and the most persuasive, is assuredly Hazlitt. And, being something of an expert in talk,[1] I think that, if I could break the grave and call the great ghosts back to earth for a spell of their mortal fury, I would begin and end with Lamb and Hazlitt: Lamb as he always was;[2] Hazlitt in one of his high and mighty moods, sweeping life, and letters, and the art of painting, and the nature of man, and the curious case of woman

[1] What I mean is, that I have heard the best, as I believe, the last of the old century and the first of the new have shown.

[2] 'He always made the best pun and the best remark in the course of the evening. His serious conversation, like his serious writing, is his best. No one ever stammered out such fine, piquant, deep, eloquent things in half a dozen half-sentences as he does. His jests scald like tears: and he probes a question with a play upon words. What a keen, laughing, hare-brained vein of home-felt truth! What choice venom!'

(especially the curious case of woman!) into a rapture of give-and-take, a night-long series of achievements in consummate speech.

VI

MANY men, as Coleridge, have written well, and yet talked better than they wrote. I have named Coleridge, though his talk, prodigious as it was, in the long run ended in 'Om-m-mject' and 'Sum-m-mject,' and though, some enchanting and undying verses apart, his writing, save when it is merely critical, is nowadays of small account. But, in truth, I have in my mind, rather, two friends, both dead, of whom one, an artist in letters, lived to conquer the English-speaking world, while the second, who should, I think, have been the greater writer, addicted himself to another art, took to letters late in life, and, having the largest and the most liberal utterance I have known, was constrained by the very process of composition so to produce himself that scarce a touch of his delightful, apprehensive, all-expressing spirit appeared upon his page. I take these two cases because both are

Two friends.

excessive. In the one you had both speech and writing; in the other you found a rarer brain, a more fanciful and daring humour, a richer gusto, perhaps a wider knowledge, in any event a wider charity. And at one point the two met, and that point was talk. Therein each was pre-eminent, each irresistible, each a master after his kind, each endowed with a full measure of those gifts that qualify the talker's temperament: as voice and eye and laugh, look and gesture, humour and fantasy, audacity and agility of mind, a lively and most impudent invention, a copious vocabulary, a right gift of foolery, a just, inevitable sense of conversational right and wrong. Well; one wrote like an angel, the other like poor Poll; and both so far excelled in talk that I can take it on me to say that they who know them only in print scarce know them at all. 'Twas thus, I imagine, with Hazlitt. He wrote the best he could; but I see many reasons to believe that he was very much more brilliant and convincing at the Southampton than he is in the most convincing and the most brilliant of his Essays. He was a full man; he had all the talker's gifts; he exulted in all kinds of oral opportunities; what more is

Hazlitt a talker.

there to say? Sure 'tis the case of all that are born to talk as well as write. They live their best in talk, and what they write is but a sop for posterity: a last dying speech and confession (as it were) to show that not for nothing were they held rare fellows in their day.

This is not to say that Hazlitt was not an admirable man of letters. His theories were many, for he was a reality among men, and so had many interests, and there was none on which he did not write forcibly, luminously, arrestingly. He had the true sense of his material, and used the English language as a painter his pigments, as a musician the varying and abounding tonalities that constitute a symphonic scheme. His were a beautiful and choice vocabulary, an excellent ear for cadence, a notable gift of expression. In fact, when Stevenson was pleased to declare that 'we are mighty fine fellows, but we cannot write like William Hazlitt,' he said no more than the truth. Whether or not we are mighty fine fellows is a Great Perhaps; but that none of us, from Stevenson down, can as writers come near to Hazlitt—this, to me, is merely indubitable. To note that he now

His style and vocabulary.

and then writes blank verse is to note that he sometimes writes impassioned prose;[1] he misquoted habitually; he was a good hater, and could be monstrous unfair; he was given to thinking twice, and his second thoughts were not always better than his first; he repeated himself as seemed good to him. But in the criticism of politics, the criticism of letters, the criticism of acting, the criticism and expression of life,[2] there is

His criticism.

[1] It filled the valley like a mist,
And still poured out its endless chant,
And still it swells upon the ear,
And wraps me in a golden trance,
Drowning the noisy tumult of the world.
. . . . . .
Like sweetest warblings from a sacred grove . . .
Contending with the wild winds as they roar . . .
And the proud places of the insolent
And the oppressor fell . . .
Such and so little is the mind of Man!

[2] His summary of the fight between Hickman and Bill Neate is alone in literature, as also in the annals of the Ring. Jon Bee was an intelligent creature of his kind, and knew a very great deal more about pugilism than Hazlitt knew; but to contrast the two is to learn much. Badcock (which is Jon Bee) had seen (and worshipped) Jem Belcher, and had reported fights with an extreme contempt for Pierce Egan, the illiterate ass who gave us *Boxiana*. Hazlitt, however, looked on at the proceedings of Neate and the Gaslight Man exactly as he had looked on at divers creations of Edmund Kean. He saw the essentials in both expressions of human activity, and his treatment of both is fundamentally the same. In both he ignores the trivial: here the acting (in its lowest

Politics and Art.

none like him. His politics are not mine; I think he is ridiculously mistaken when he contrasts the Wordsworth of the best things in *The Excursion* with the 'classic Akenside'; his *Byron* is the merest petulance; his *Burke* (when he is in a bad temper with Burke), his *Fox*, his *Pitt*, his *Bonaparte*—these are impossible. Also I never talk art or life with him but I disagree. But I go on reading him, all the same; and I find that technically and spiritually I am always the better for the bout. Where outside Boswell is there better talk than in Hazlitt's *Boswell Redivivus*—his so-called *Conversations with Northcote*? And his *Age of*

sense), there the hits that did not count. And thus, as he gives you only the vital touches, you know how and why Neate beat Hickman, and can tell the exact moment at which Hickman began to be a beaten man. 'Tis the same with his panegyric on Cavanagh, the fives-player. For a blend of gusto with understanding I know but one thing to equal with this: the note on Dr. Grace, which appeared in *The National Observer*; and the night that that was written, I sent the writer back to Hazlitt's *Cavanagh*, and said to him ——! On the whole the *Dr. Grace* is the better of the two. But it has scarce the incorruptible fatness of the *Cavanagh*. Gusto, though, is Hazlitt's special attribute: he glories in what he likes, what he reads, what he feels, what he writes. He triumphed in his Kean, his Shakespeare, his Bill Neate, his Rousseau, his coffee-and-cream and *Love for Love* in the inn-parlour at Alton. He relished things; and expressed them with a relish. That is his 'note.' Some others have relished only the consummate expression of nothing.

Elizabeth, and his *Comic Writers*, and his *Spirit of the Age*—where else to look for such a feeling for differences, such a sense of literature, such an instant, such a masterful, whole-hearted interest in the marking and distinguishing qualities of writers? And *The Plain Speaker*—is it not at least as good reading as (say) *Virginibus Puerisque* and the discoursings of the late imperishable Mr. Pater! His *Political Essays* is readable after—how many years? His notes on Kean and the Siddons are as novel and convincing as when they were penned. In truth, he is ever a solace and a refreshment. As a critic of letters he lacks the intense, immortalising vision, even as he lacks, in places, the illuminating and inevitable style of Lamb. But if he be less savoury, he is also more solid, and he gives you phrases, conclusions, splendours of insight and expression, high-piled and golden essays in appreciation: as the *Wordsworth* and the *Coleridge* of the *Political Essays*, the character of Hamlet, the note on Shakespeare's style, the *Horne Tooke*, the *Cervantes*, the *Rousseau*, the *Sir Thomas Browne*, the *Cobbett*: that must ever be rated high among the possessions of the English mind.

Par nobile fratrum.

As a writer, therefore, it is with Lamb that I would bracket him: they are dissimilars, but they go gallantly and naturally together—*par nobile fratrum.*[1] Give us these two, with some ripe Cobbett, a volume of Southey, some Wordsworth, certain pages of Shelley, a great deal of the Byron who wrote letters, and we get the right prose of the time. The best of it all, perhaps, is the best of Lamb. But Hazlitt's, for different qualities, is so imminent and shining a second that I hesitate as to the pre-eminency. Probably the race is Lamb's. But Hazlitt is ever Hazlitt; and at his highest moments Hazlitt is hard to beat, and has not these many years been beaten.

[1] Listen, else, to Lamb himself: 'Protesting against much that he has written, and some things which he chooses to do; judging him by his conversation which I enjoyed so long, and relished so deeply; or by his books, in those places where no clouding passion intervenes, I should belie my own conscience if I said less than that I think W. H. to be, in his natural and healthy state, one of the wisest and finest spirits breathing. So far from being ashamed of that intimacy which was betwixt us, it is my boast that I was able for so many years to have preserved it entire; and I think I shall go to my grave without finding or expecting to find such another companion.' Thus does one Royalty celebrate the kingship and enrich the immortality of another.

ROBERT BURNS

(1759-1796)

IN 1759 the Kirk of Scotland, though a less potent and offensive tyranny than it had been in the good old times, was still a tyranny, and was still offensive and still potent enough to make life miserable, to warp the characters of men and women, and to turn the tempers and affections of many from the kindly, natural way. True it is that Hutcheson (1694-1746) had for some years taught, and taught with such authority as an University chair can give, a set of doctrines in absolute antagonism with the principles on which the Kirk of Scotland's rule was based, and with the ambitions which the majority in the Kirk of Scotland held in view. But these doctrines, sane

The Kirk of Scotland.

NOTE.—The references throughout this Essay are to *The Poetry of Robert Burns*, edited by W. E. Henley and T. F. Henderson. In Four Volumes. Edinburgh: T. C. and E. C. Jack. 1897.

and invigorating as they were, had not reached the general; and in all departments of life among the general the Kirk of Scotland was a paramount influence, and, despite the intrusion of some generous intelligences, was largely occupied with the work of narrowing the minds, perverting the instincts, and constraining the spiritual and social liberties of its subjects. In 1759, however, there was secreted the certainty of a revulsion against its ascendency; for that year saw the birth of the most popular poet, and the most anti-clerical withal, that Scotland ever bred. He came of the people on both sides; he had a high courage, a proud heart, a daring mind, a matchless gift of speech, an abundance of humour and wit and fire; he was a poet in whom were quintessentialised the elements of the Vernacular Genius, in whose work the effects and the traditions of the Vernacular School, which had struggled back into being in the Kirk's despite, were repeated with surpassing brilliancy; and in the matter of the Kirk he did for the people a piece of service equal and similar to that which was done on other lines and in other spheres by Hutcheson and Hume and Adam Smith. He was apostle

The Poet's birth.

and avenger as well as maker. He did more than give Scotland songs to sing and rhymes to read: he showed that laughter and the joy of life need be no crimes, and that freedom of thought and sentiment and action is within the reach of him that will stretch forth his hand to take it. He pushed his demonstration to extremes; often his teaching has been grossly misread and misapprehended; no doubt, too, he died of his effort—and himself. But most men do as they must—not as they will. It was Burns's destiny, as it was Byron's in his turn, to be 'the passionate and dauntless soldier of a forlorn hope'; and if he fell in mid-assault, he found, despite the circumstances of his passing, the best death man can find. He had faults and failings not a few. But he was ever a leader among men; and if the manner of his leading were not seldom reckless, and he did some mischief, and gave the Fool a great deal of what passes for good Scripture for his folly, it will be found in the long-run that he led for truth—the truth which 'maketh free'; so that the Scotland he loved so well, and took such pride in honouring, could scarce have been the Scotland she is, had he not been.

His gift to the people.

I

His parents.

HIS father, William Burness (or Burnes), and his mother, Agnes Brown, came both of yeoman stock: native the one to Kincardineshire, the other to Ayrshire. William Burness began life as a gardener, and was plying his trade in the service of one Fergusson, the then Provost of Ayr, when, with a view to setting up for himself, he took a lease of seven acres in the parish of Alloway, with his own hands built a two-roomed clay cottage—(still standing, but in use as a Burns Museum),—and in the December of 1757 married Agnes Brown, his junior by eleven years. She was red-haired, dark-eyed, square-browed, well-made, and quick-tempered. He was swarthy and thin; a man of strong sense, a very serious mind, the most vigilant affections,[1] and a piety not even the Calvinism in which he had been reared could ever make brooding

[1] In times of storm, he would seek out and stay with his daughter, where she was herding in the fields, because he knew that she was afraid of lightning; or, when it was fair, to teach her the names of plants and flowers. He wrote a little theological treatise for his children's guidance, too, and was, it is plain, an exemplary father, and so complete a husband that there is record of but a single unpleasantness between him and Agnes his wife.

and inhumane. And in the clay cottage to which he had taken his new-married wife, Robert, the first of seven children, was born to them on the 25th January 1759.

The Scots peasant.

The Scots peasant lived hard, toiled incessantly, and fed so cheaply that even on high days and holidays his diet (as set forth in *The Blithesome Bridal*) consisted largely in preparations of meal and vegetables and what is technically known as 'offal.' But the Scots peasant was a creature of the Kirk; the noblest ambition of Knox[1] was an active influence in the Kirk; and the Parish Schools enabled the Kirk to provide

[1] The Reformer had a vast deal more in common with Burns than with the 'sour John Knox' of Browning's ridiculous verses. He was the man of a crisis, and a desperate one; and he played his part in it like the stark and fearless opposite that he was. But he was a humourist, he loved his glass of wine, he abounded in humanity and intelligence, he married two wives, he was as well beloved as he was extremely hated and feared. He could not foresee what the collective stupidity of posterity would make of his teaching and example, nor how the theocracy at whose establishment he aimed would presently assert itself as largely a system of parochial inquisitions. The minister's man who had looked through *his* keyhole would have got short shrift from *him*; and in the Eighteenth Century he had as certainly stood with Burns against the Kirk of Scotland, as represented by Auld and Russell and the like, as in the Sixteenth he stood with Moray and the nobles against the Church of Rome, as figured in David Beaton and the 'twa infernal monstris, Pride and Avarice.'

its creatures with such teaching as it deemed desirable. William Burness was 'a very poor man' (R. B.). But he had the right tradition; he was a thinker and an observer; he read whatever he could get to read; he wrote English formally but with clarity;[1] and he did the very best he could for his children in the matter of education. Robert went to school at six;[2] and in the May of the same year (1765) a lad of eighteen, one John Murdoch, was 'engaged by Mr. Burness and four of his neighbours to teach, and accordingly began to teach, the little school at Alloway'; his 'five employers' undertaking to board him 'by turns, and to make up a certain salary at the end of the year,' in the event of his

Burns's education.

[1] See the aforesaid treatise: '*A Manual of Religious Belief, in a Dialogue between Father and Son*, compiled by William Burnes, farmer at Mount Oliphant, and transcribed, with grammatical corrections, by John Murdoch, teacher.'

[2] 'I was a good deal noted at these years,' says the *Letter to Moore*, 'for a retentive memory, a stubborn, sturdy *something* in my disposition, and an enthusiastic *idiot*-piety. . . . In my infant and boyish days, too, I owed much to an old maid of my mother's, remarkable for her ignorance, credulity, and superstition,' who had, 'I suppose, the largest collection in the county of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, death-lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantraips, enchanted towers, giants, dragons, and other trumpery. This cultivated the latent seeds of Poesy,' *etc.*

'quarterly payments' not amounting to a specified sum. He was an intelligent pedagogue—(he had William Burness behind him)—especially in the matter of grammar and rhetoric; he trained his scholars to a full sense of the meaning and the value of words; he even made them 'turn verse into its natural prose order,' and 'substitute synonymous expressions for poetical words and . . . supply all the ellipses.'[1] One of his school-books was the Bible, another Masson's *Collection of Prose and Verse*, excerpted from Addison[2] and Steele and Dryden, from Thomson and Shenstone, Mallet and Henry Mackenzie, with Gray's *Elegy*, scraps from Hume and Robertson,

[1] As Robert Louis Stevenson has remarked (*Some Aspects of Robert Burns*):—'We are surprised at the prose style of Robert; that of Gilbert need surprise us no less.'

[2] 'The earliest thing of composition I recollect taking pleasure in, was *The Vision of Mirza*, and a hymn of Addison's beginning, "How are thy servants blessed, O Lord"' (R. B., *Letter to Moore*). 'The first two books,' he adds, 'I ever read in private, and which gave me more pleasure than any two books I ever read again, were the *Life of Hannibal* and the *History of Sir William Wallace*. Hannibal gave my young ideas such a turn that I used to strut in raptures up and down after the recruiting-drum and bag-pipe, and wish myself tall enough that I might be a soldier; while the story of Wallace poured a Scottish prejudice in my veins which will boil along there (*sic*) till the floodgates of life shut in eternal rest.'

and scenes from *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet*. And one effect of his method was that Robert, according to himself, 'was absolutely a critic in substantives, verbs, and participles,' and, according to Gilbert, 'soon became remarkable for the fluency and correctness of his expression, and read the few books that came in his way with much pleasure and improvement.' It is very characteristic of Murdoch that when, his school being broken up, he came to take leave of William Burness at Mount Oliphant, 'he brought us,' Gilbert says, 'a present and memorial of him, a small English grammar and the tragedy of *Titus Andronicus*,' and that 'by way of passing the evening' he 'began to read the play aloud.' Not less characteristic of all concerned was the effect of his reading. His hearers melted into tears at the tale of Lavinia's woes, and, 'in an agony of distress,' implored him to read no more. Ever sensible and practical, William Burness remarked that, as nobody wanted to hear the play, Murdoch need not leave it. Robert, ever a sentimentalist and ever an indifferent Shakespearean,[1]—'Robert

Murdoch the Pedagogue.

[1] If we may judge him from his extant work. *Cf.* the absurd line :—

'Here *Douglas* forms wild Shakespeare into plan.'

replied that, if it was left, he would burn it.' And Murdoch, ever the literary guide, philosopher, and friend, was so much affected by his pupil's 'sensibility,' that 'he left *The School for Love* (translated, I think, from the French)' in Shakespeare's place.[1]

At this time Burns had but some two and a half years of Murdoch. William

He cribs but once from Shakespeare, and the happiest among his few quotations is prefixed to one of the most felicitous—and therefore the least publishable—of his tributes to the Light-heeled Muse. 'Sing me a bawdy song,' he says with Sir John Falstaff, 'to make us merry.' And he adds this note, in which he is Shakespearean once again :—'There is—there must be some truth in original sin. My violent propensity to b—dy convinces me of it. Lack a day! If that species of composition be the special sin never-to-be-forgotten in this world nor in that which is to come, then I am the most offending soul alive. Mair for token,' *etc.* (R. B. to Cleghorn, 25th October 1793).

[1] There is no trace of any *School for Love*. It is therefore probable that what Gilbert meant was *The School for Lovers* : 'A Comedy. As it is acted at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane. By William Whitehead, Esq. ; Poet Laureat. London : Printed for R. and J. Dodsley in Pall-Mall ; and sold by J. Hinxman, in Pater-noster-row. MDCCLXII.' The first sentence of the author's *Advertisement* runs thus :—'The following Comedy is formed on a plan of Monsieur de Fontenelle's, never intended for the stage, and printed in the eighth volume of his works, under the title of *Le Testament*.' The names of the chief 'persons represented' are Sir John Dorilant, Modely, Belmour, Lady Beverley, Cælia, and Araminta : an unlikely lot, one would say, for an Ayrshire farmstead, even though it sheltered the youthful Burns.

Burness liked and believed in the young fellow; for when, still urged by the desire to better his children's chance, he turned from gardening to cultivation on a larger scale, and took, at a £40 rental, the farm of Mount Oliphant, his two sons went on with Murdoch at Alloway, some two miles off. The school once broken up, however, Robert and his brother fell into their father's hands, and, for divers reasons, Gilbert says, 'we rarely saw any body but the members of our own family,' so that 'my father was for some time the only companion we had.' It will scarce be argued now that this sole companionship was wholly good for a couple of lively boys; but it is beyond question that it was rather good than bad. For, 'he conversed on all subjects with us familiarly, as if we had been men,' and, further, 'was at great pains, as we accompanied him in the labours of the farm, to lead the conversation to such subjects as might tend to increase our knowledge or confirm our virtuous habits.' Also, he got his charges books—a *Geographical Grammar*, a *Physico and Astro-Theology*, Stackhouse's *History of the Bible*, Ray's *Wisdom of God in the Creation*; and these books

Burns's books.

Robert read 'with an avidity and industry scarcely to be equalled.'[1] 'None,' says Gilbert, 'was so voluminous as to slacken his industry or so antiquated as to damp his research': with the result that he wasn't very far on in his 'teens ere he had 'a com-

[1] Robert's list (*Letter to Moore*) includes Guthrie and Salmon's *Geographical Grammar*; *The Spectator*; Pope; 'some plays of Shakespear' (acting editions? or odd volumes?); 'Tull and Dickson on Agriculture'; *The Pantheon*; Locke *On the Human Understanding*; Stackhouse; with 'Justice's *British Gardener*, Boyle's *Lectures*, Allan Ramsay's *Works*, Dr. Taylor's *Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin*, *A Select Collection of English Songs*, and Harvey's *Meditations*.' Later he knew Thomson, Shenstone, Beattie, Goldsmith, Gray, Fergusson, Spenser even: with *The Tea-Table Miscellany* and many another song-book, Adam Smith's *Theory of the Moral Sentiments*, Reid's *Inquiry into the Human Mind*, Bunyan, Boston (*The Fourfold State*), Shakespeare, John Brown's *Self-Interpreting Bible*, and *The Wealth of Nations*, which last he is found reading (at Ellisland) with a sense of wonder that so much wit should be contained between the boards of a single book. One favourite novel was *Tristram Shandy*; another, the once renowned, now utterly forgotten *Man of Feeling*. At Ellisland, again, he is found ordering the works of divers dramatists—as Jonson, Wycherley, Molière—with a view to reading and writing for the stage. But you find no trace of them in his work; nor is there any evidence to show that he could ever have written a decent play, though there is plenty of proof that he could *not*. No doubt, *The Jolly Beggars* will be quoted against me here. But the essential interests of that masterpiece are character and description. Now, there go many more things to the making of a play than character, while, as for description, the less a play contains of that the better for the play.

petent knowledge of ancient history,' with 'something of geography, astronomy and natural history.' Then, owing to the mistake of an uncle, who went to Ayr to buy a *Ready Reckoner or Tradesman's Sure Guide*, together with a *Complete Letter-Writer*, but came back with 'a collection of letters by the most eminent writers,' he was moved by 'a strong desire to excel in letter-writing.' At thirteen or fourteen he was sent ('week about' with Gilbert) to Dalrymple Parish School to better his handwriting; 'about this time' he fell in with *Pamela*, Fielding, Hume, Robertson, and the best of Smollett; and 'about this time' Murdoch set up as a schoolmaster in Ayr, and 'sent us Pope's *Works* and some other poetry, the first that we had an opportunity of reading, excepting what is contained in the *English Collection* and in the volume of the *Edinburgh Magazine* for 1772.'[1] The

At Dalrymple School.

[1] The *English Collection* I take to be Masson's aforesaid. At all events I can find no other. So far as verse is concerned, another exception was found in 'those *Excellent new Songs* that are hawked about the country in baskets or spread on stalls in the streets' (G. B.). They were probably as interesting to Robert as Pope's *Works* or the poetry in *The Edinburgh Magazine*. At any rate, his first essays in song were imitated from them, and he had the trick of them, when he listed, all his life long.

summer after the writing-lessons at Dalrymple, Robert spent three weeks with Murdoch at Ayr, one over the English Grammar, the others over the rudiments of French. The latter language he was presently able to read,[1] for the reason that Murdoch would go over to Mount Oliphant on half-holidays, partly for Robert's sake and partly for the pleasure of talking with Robert's father. Thus was Robert schooled; and 'tis plain that in one, and that an essential particular, he and his brother were exceptionally fortunate in their father and in the means he took to train them.[2]

In another respect—one of eminent importance—their luck was nothing like so good. Mount Oliphant was made up of

[1] Currie saw his Molière at Dumfries. There is no question but he would have got on excellent well with Argan and Jourdain and Pourceaugnac; but could he have found much to interest him in Arnolphe and Agnès, in Philinte and Alceste and Célimène? I doubt it. On the other hand, he would certainly have loved the *flon-flons* which Collé wrote for the Regent's private theatre; and I have always regretted that he read (1789) to no better purpose the La Fontaine of the *Contes*: a Scots parallel to which he was exactly fitted to achieve.

[2] Robert mastered, besides, the first six books of Euclid, and even dabbled a little in Latin now and then: reverting to his 'Rudiments' (says Gilbert) when he was crossed in love, or had tiffed with his sweetheart.

'the poorest land in Ayrshire'; William Burness had started it on a borrowed hundred; he was soon in straits; only by unremitting diligence and the strictest economy could he hope to make ends meet; and the burden of hard work lay heavy on the whole family—heavier, as I think, on the growing lads than on the made man and woman. 'For several years,' says Gilbert, 'butcher's meat was a stranger to the house.' Robert was his father's chief hand at fifteen—'for we kept no hired servant'—and could afterwards describe his life at this time as a combination of 'the cheerless gloom of a hermit with the unceasing toil of a galley-slave.' The mental wear was not less than the physical strain: for William Burness grew old and broken, and his family was seven strong, and of money there was as little as there seemed of hope. The wonder is, not that Robert afterwards broke *out* but, that Robert did not then break *down*: that he escaped with a life-long tendency to vapours and melancholia, and at the time of trial itself with that 'dull headache' of an evening, which 'at a future period . . . was exchanged,' says Gilbert, 'for a palpitation of the heart and

Poverty and work.

a threatening of fainting and suffocation in his bed in the night-time.' William Burness is indeed a pathetic figure; but to me the Robert of Mount Oliphant is a figure more pathetic still. Acquired or not, stoicism was habitual with the father. With the son it was not so much as acquired; for in that son was latent a world of appetites and forces and potentialities the reverse of stoical. And, even had this not been: if Robert hadn't proved a man of genius, with the temperament which genius sometimes entails: he must still have been the worse for the experience. He lived in circumstances of unwonted harshness and bitterness for a lad of his degree; with a long misery of anticipation, he must endure a quite unnatural strain on forming muscle and on nerves and a brain yet immature; he had perforce to face the necessity of diverting an absolute example of the artistic temperament to laborious and squalid ends, and to assist in the repression of all those natural instincts —of sport and reverie and companionship— the fostering of which is for most boys, have they genius or have they not, an essential process of development; and the experience left him with stooping shoulders and a

A harsh and bitter life.

heavy gait, an ineradicable streak of sentimentalism, what he himself calls 'the horrors of a diseased nervous system,' and that very practical exultation in the *joie de vivre*, once it was known, which, while it is brilliantly expressed in much published and unpublished verse and prose, is nowhere, perhaps, so naïvely signified as in a pleasant parenthesis addressed, years after Mount Oliphant, to the highly respectable Thomson:—'Nothing (*since a Highland wench in the Cowgate* once *bore me three bastards at a birth*) has surprised me more than,' *etc.* The rest is not to my purpose: which is to argue that, given Robert Burns and the apprenticeship at Mount Oliphant, a violent reaction was inevitable, and that one's admiration for him is largely increased by the reflection that it came no sooner than it did. William Burness knew that it must come; for, as he lay dying, he confessed that it troubled him to think of Robert's future. This, to be sure, was not at Mount Oliphant: when Robert had done no worse than insist on going to a dancing-school: but years after, at Lochlie, when Robert had begun to assert himself. True it is that at Kirkoswald—a smuggling village, whither he

Inevitable reaction.

went, at seventeen, to study mensuration, 'dialling,' and the like—he had learned, he says, 'to look unconcernedly on a large tavern bill and mix without fear in a drunken squabble.' True it is, too, that at Lochlie the visible reaction had set in. But, so far as is known, that reaction was merely formal; and one may safely conjecture that, as boys are not in the habit of telling their fathers everything, William Burness knew little or nothing of those gallant hours at Kirkoswald. For all this, though, he seems to have discerned, however dimly and vaguely, some features of the prodigious creature he had helped into the world; and that he should not have discerned them till thus late is of itself enough to show how stern and how effectual a discipline Mount Oliphant had proved.

II

THE Mount Oliphant period lasted some twelve years, and was at its hardest for some time ere it reached its term. 'About 1775 my father's generous master died,'[1]

[1] This was that Fergusson (of Ayr) in whose service William Burness had been at the time of his marriage with Agnes Brown, and (apparently) for some years after it—in fact, till

says Robert; and 'to clench the curse we fell into the hands of a factor, who sat for the picture[1] I have drawn of one in my tale of "Twa Dogs." . . . My father's spirit was soon irritated, but not easily broken. There was a freedom in his lease in two years more, and to weather these *we retrenched expenses*'—to the purpose and with the effect denoted! Then came easier times. In 1777 William Burness removed his family to Lochlie, a hundred-and-thirty-acre farm, in Tarbolton Parish. 'The nature of the bargain,' Robert wrote to Moore, 'was such as to throw a little ready money in his hand in the commencement,' or 'the affair would

Easier times.

he took on Mount Oliphant. This he did on a hundred pounds borrowed from his old employer; and one may conjecture that the legal proceedings which Robert thus resented were entailed upon Fergusson's agents by the work of winding up the estate.

[1] 'Sat for the picture I have drawn of one' is precise and definite enough. But surely the Factor verses in *The Twa Dogs* are less a picture than a record of proceedings, a note on the *genus* Factor:—

> 'He 'll stamp and threaten, curse and swear,
> He 'll apprehend them, poind their gear,
> While they must stand, wi' aspect humble,
> An' hear it a', and fear and tremble.'

The statement is accurate enough, no doubt, but where is the 'picture'? Compare the effect of any one of Chaucer's Pilgrims, or the sketches of Cæsar and Luath themselves, and the Factor as individual is found utterly wanting.

have been impracticable.' At this place, he adds, 'for four years we lived comfortably'; and at this place his gay and adventurous spirit began to free itself, his admirable talent for talk to find fit opportunities for exercise and display. The reaction set in, as I have said, and he took life as gallantly as his innocency might, wore the only tied hair in the parish, was recognisable from afar by his fillemot plaid, was made a 'Free and Accepted Mason,'[1] founded a Bachelors' Club,[2] and took to sweethearting with all his heart and soul and strength. He had begun with a little harvester at fifteen, and at Kirkoswald he had been enamoured of Peggy Thomson to the point of sleepless

At Lochlie.

[1] Burns was always an enthusiastic Mason. The Masonic idea—whatever that may be—went home to him; and in honour of the Craft he wrote some of his poorest verses. One set, the 'Adieu, Adieu,' *etc.*, of the Kilmarnock Volume, was popular outside Scotland. At all events, I have seen a parody in a Belfast chap which is set to the tune of *Burn's Farewell.*

[2] It was, in fact, part drinking-club and part debating-society. But Rule X. of its constitution insisted that every member must have at least one love-affair on hand; and if potations were generally thin, and debates were often serious, there can be no question that the talk ran on all manner of themes, and especially on that one theme which men have ever found fruitful above all others. The club was so great a success that an offshoot was founded, by desire, on Robert's removal to Mossgiel.

nights. Now, says his brother Gilbert, 'he was constantly the victim of some fair enslaver'—sometimes of two or three at a time; and 'the symptoms of his passion were often such as nearly to equal those of the celebrated Sappho,' so that 'the agitation of his mind and body exceeded anything I know in real life.' Such, too, was the quality of what he himself was pleased to call 'un penchant à (*sic*) l'adorable moitié du genre humain,' in combination with that 'particular jealousy' he had 'of people that were richer than himself, or who had more consequence in life,' that a plain face was quite as good as a pretty one: especially and particularly if it belonged to a maid of a lower degree than his own. To condescend upon one's women—to some men that is an ideal. It was certainly the ideal of Robert Burns. 'His love,' says Gilbert, 'rarely settled upon persons of this description'—that is, persons 'who were richer than himself, or who had more consequence in life.' He must still be Jove—still stoop from Olympus to the plain. Apparently he held it to be an honour to be admired by him; and when, a short while hence (1786), he ventured to celebrate, in rather too realistic

a strain, the Lass of Ballochmyle, and was rebuffed for his impertinence—(it was so felt in those unregenerate days!)—he was, 'tis said, extremely mortified. In the meanwhile, his loves, whether pretty or plain, were goddesses all; and the Sun was 'entering Virgo, a month which is always a carnival in my imagination,' the whole year round; and the wonder is that he got off so little of it all in verse which he thought too good for the fire. Rhyme he did (of course), and copiously: as at this stage every coming male must rhyme, who has instinct enough to 'couple *love* and *dove*.' But it was not till the end of the Lochlie years that he began rhyming to any purpose. Indeed, the poverty of the Lochlie years is scarce less 'wonderful past all whooping' than the fecundity of certain memorable months at Mauchline: especially if it be true, as Gilbert and himself aver, that the Lochlie love-affairs were 'governed by the strictest rules of modesty and virtue, from which he never deviated till his twenty-third year.'[1] For desire makes verses, and

Love and rhyme.

[1] Saunders Tait, the Tarbolton poetaster, insists that, long before Mossgiel, Burns and Sillar—'Davie, a Brother Poet'—were the most incontinent youngsters in Tarbolton Parish;

verses rather good than bad, as surely as fruition leaves verses, whether bad or good, unmade.

It was natural and honourable in a young man of this lusty and amatorious habit to look round for a wife and to cast about him for a better means of keeping one than farm-service would afford. In respect of the first he found a possibility in Ellison Begbie, a Galston farmer's daughter, at this time a domestic servant, on whom he wrote (they say) his 'Song of Similes,' and to whom he addressed some rather stately, not to say

and, after asseverating, in terms as solemn as he can make them, that in all Scotland

'There 's none like you and Burns can tout
The bawdy horn,'

goes on to particularise, and declares that, what with 'Moll and Meg,

Jean, Sue, and Lizzey, a' decoy't,
There 's sax wi' egg.'

Worse than all, he indites a 'poem,' a certain *B—ns in his Infancy*, which begins thus :—

'Now I must trace his pedigree,
Because he made a song on me,
And let the world look and see,
Just wi' my tongue,
How he and Clootie did agree
When he was young' :—

and of which I shall quote no more. But Robert and his brother are both explicit on this point ; and despite the easy morals of the class in which the Bard sought now and ever

pedantic, documents in the form of love-letters. For the new line in life, he determined that it might, perhaps, be flax-dressing; so, at the midsummer of 1781 (having just before been sent about his business by, as he might himself have said, 'le doux objet de son attachement') he removed to Irvine, a little port on the Firth of Clyde, which was also a centre of the industry in which he hoped to excel. Here he established himself, on what terms is not known, with one Peacock, whom he

Flax-dressing.

'to crown his flame,' it must be held, I think, as proven, that he was *déniaisé* by Richard Brown at Irvine and by Betty Paton at Lochlie.

This is the place to say that I owe my quotations from Saunders Tait to Dr. Grosart, who told me of the copy (probably unique) of that worthy's Poems and Songs: 'Printed for and Sold by the Author Only, 1796': in the Mitchell Library, Glasgow, and at the same time communicated transcripts which he had made from such numbers in it as referred to Burns. As my collaborator, Mr. T. F. Henderson, was then in Scotland, I asked him to look up Tait's volume. It was found at last, after a prolonged search; was duly sent to the Burns Exhibition; and in a while was pronounced 'a discovery.' Tait, who was pedlar, tailor, soldier in turn, had a ribald and scurrilous tongue, a certain rough cleverness, and a good enough command of the vernacular; so that his tirades against Burns—(he was one of the very few who dared to attack that satirist)—are still readable, apart from the interest which attaches to their theme. It is a pity that some Burns Club or Burns Society has not reprinted them in full, coarse as they are.

afterwards took occasion to describe as 'a scoundrel of the first water, who made money by the mystery of Thieving';[1] here he saw something more of life and character and the world than he had seen at Mount Oliphant and Lochlie; here, at the year's end, he had a terrible attack of vapours (it lasted for months, he says, so that he shuddered to recall the time); here, above all, he formed a friendship with a certain Richard Brown. According to him, Brown being the son of a mechanic, had taken the eye of 'a great man in the neighbourhood,' and had received 'a genteel education, with a view to bettering his situation in life.' His patron had died, however, and he had perforce to go for a sailor (he was afterwards captain of a West-Indiaman). He had

His friendship with Richard Brown.

[1] Nobody knows what this may mean. It seems to be only Robert's lofty way of saying that Peacock swindled him. What follows is explicit (*Letter to Moore*):—'To finish the whole, while we were giving a welcome carousal to the New Year, our shop, by the drunken carelessness of my partner's wife, took fire, and burned to ashes, and I was left, like a true poet, not worth sixpence.' How much is here of fact, how much of resentment, who shall say? What is worth noting in it all is that Burns, despite his 'penchant à l'adorable,' *etc.*, is first and last a peasant so far as 'l'adorable moitié' is concerned, and, for all his sentimentalism, can face facts about it with all the peasant's shrewdness and with all the peasant's cynicism.

known good luck and bad, he had seen the world, he had the morals of his calling, at the same time that 'his mind was fraught with courage, independance, and magnanimity, and every noble, manly virtue'; and Burns, who 'loved him,' and 'admired him,' not only 'strove to imitate him' but also 'in some measure succeeded.' 'I had,' the pupil owns, 'the pride before'; but Brown 'taught it to flow in proper channels.' Withal, Brown 'was the only man I ever saw who was a greater fool than myself when Woman was the presiding star.' Brown, however, was a practical amorist; and he 'spoke of a certain fashionable failing with levity, which hitherto I had regarded with horror.' In fact, he was Mephisto to Burns's Faust;[1] and 'here,' says the Bard, 'his friendship did me a mischief, and the consequence was, that soon after I assumed the plough, I wrote the enclosed *Welcome*.' This enclosure (to Moore) was that half-humorous, half-defiant, and wholly delightful *Welcome to His Love-Begotten Daughter*,[2] through which

[1] Brown denied it. 'Illicit love!' quoth he. 'Levity of a sailor! When I first knew Burns he had nothing to learn in that respect.' It is a case of word against word; and I own that I prefer the Bard's.

[2] 'The same cheap self-satisfaction finds a yet uglier vent

the spirit of the true Burns—the Burns of the good years: proud, generous, whole-hearted, essentially natural and humane—thrills from the first line to the last. And we have to recall the all-important fact, that Burns was first and last a peasant,[1] and first and last a peasant in revolt against the Kirk, a peasant resolute to be a buck, to forgive the really scandalous contrast presented in those versions of the affair—(versions done in the true buckish style: the leer, and the grin and the slang in full blast)—which he has given in *The Fornicator*, the *Epistle to John Rankine*, and—apparently—the *Reply to a Trimming Epistle from a Tailor*. At the same time we must clearly understand that we recall all this for the sake of our precious selves, and not in any way, nor on any account, for the sake of Burns. He was absolutely of his station

A peasant in revolt.

when he plumes himself on the scandal at the birth of his first bastard child.' Thus Stevenson. But Stevenson, as hath been said, had in him 'something of the Shorter Catechist'; and either he did not see, or he would not recognise, that Burns's rejoicings in the fact of paternity were absolutely sincere throughout his life.

[1] Here and elsewhere the word is used, not opprobriously, but literally. Burns was specifically a peasant, as Byron was specifically a peer, and as Shakespeare was specifically a man of the burgess class.

and his time; the poor-living, lewd, grimy, free-spoken, ribald, old Scots peasant-world[1] came to a full, brilliant, even majestic close in his work; and, if we would appreciate aright the environment in which he wrote, and the audience to which such writings were addressed, we must transliterate into the Vernacular Brantôme and the *Dames Galantes* and Tallemant and the *Historiettes*. As for reading them in Victorian terms—Early-Victorian terms, or Late—that way madness lies; madness, and a Burns that by no process known to gods or men could ever have existed save in the lubber-land of some Pious Editor's dream.

At Lochlie, whither he seems to have returned in the March of 1782, the studious years[2] and the old comparative prosperity had come, or were coming, to a close. There had been a quarrel between William Burness and his landlord, one M'Clure, a merchant in Ayr; and this quarrel, being about money, duly passed into the Courts. Its

[1] I do not, of course, forget its many solid and admirable virtues; but its elements were mixed, and it was to the grosser that the Burns of these and other rhymes appealed.

[2] It was parish gossip that, if you called on William Burness at meal-time, you found the whole family with a book in one hand and a horn spoon in the other.

circumstances are obscure; but it is history that arbitration went against the tenant of Lochlie, that he was ordered to 'quite possession,' that he was strongly suspected of 'preparing himself accordingly by dispossessing of his stock and crops,' and that a certain 'application at present craving' resulted, on shrieval authority, in the 'sequestration' of all the Lochlie stock and plenishing and gear. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the affair, an end came to it with the end of William Burness. By this time his health was broken—he was far gone in what Robert calls a 'phthisical consumption'; and he died in the February of the next year (1784), when, as the same Robert romantically puts it in his fine, magniloquent fashion, 'his all went among the rapacious hell-hounds that growl in the Kennel of Justice.'[1] The fact that Robert and Gilbert were able (Martinmas 1783), when their father's affairs were 'drawing to

The death of William Burness.

[1] M'Clure's 'answers' and 'counter-answers,' together with the sheriff's officer's account of the seizure of Lochlie, were published in *The Glasgow Herald* early in the present year (1897). I need scarce say that Saunders Tait produced a *Burns at Lochly*, in which he fell on his enemy tooth and claw. His statements are as specific as M'Clure's, and are substantially in agreement with some of them, besides :—

a crisis,' to secure another farm—Mossgiel—in Mauchline Parish, some two or three miles off Lochlie, is enough to show that neither errors nor crosses, neither sequestrations nor lampoons, had impaired the family credit.

III

WILLIAM BURNESS had paid his children wages during his tenancy of Lochlie; and the elder four, by presenting themselves as his creditors for wages due, were enabled to secure a certain amount of 'plenishing and gear' wherewith to make a

The farm at Mossgiel.

'To Lochly ye came like a clerk,
And on your back was scarce a sark,
The dogs did at your buttocks bark,
But now ye're bra',
Ye pouch't the rent, ye was sae stark,
Made payment sma'.

In another stanza, 'M'Clure,' he says—

'Ye scarcely left a mite
To fill his horn,
You and the Lawyers gied him a skyte,
Sold a' his corn.'

In a third he appears to record the particulars of a single combat between Robert and his father's landlord :—

'His ain gun at him he did cock,
An' never spared,
Wi't owre his heid came a clean knock
Maist killed the laird.'

start at Mossgiel. It was a family venture, in whose success the Burnesses were interested all and severally, and to which each one looked for food and clothes and hire (the brothers got a yearly fee of £7 apiece); and, as all were well and thoroughly trained in farming work, and had never lived other than sparely, it was reasonable in them to believe that the enterprise would prosper. That it did not begin by prospering was no fault of

And in the last of all, after bitterly reproaching Robert and the whole Burns race with ingratitude :—

> 'M'Clure he put you in a farm,
> And coft you coals your a—— to warm
> And meal and maut. . . .
> He likewise did the mailin stock,
> And built you barns' :—

he sets forth explicitly this charge :—

> 'M'Clure's estate has ta'en the fever,
> And heal again it will be never,
> The vagabonds, they ca' you clever,
> Ye 're sic a sprite,
> To rive fra' him baith ga' and liver,
> And baith the feet.'

The fact of the Laird's generosity is reaffirmed with emphasis in *A Compliment* :—

> 'The horse, corn, pets, kail, kye, and ewes,
> Cheese, pease, beans, rye, wool, house and flours,
> Pots, pans, crans, tongs, bran-spits, and skewrs,
> The milk and barm,
> Each thing they had was a' M'Clure's,
> He stock'd the farm.' . . .

And with the remark that '*Five hundred pounds they were behind*,' the undaunted Saunders brings his libel to a close.

Robert's. He made excellent resolutions, and, what was more to the purpose, he kept them—for a time. He 'read farming books' (thus he displays himself), he 'calculated crops,' he 'attended markets'; he worked hard in the fields, he kept his body at least in temperance and soberness, and, as for thrift, there is Gilbert's word for it, that his expenses never exceeded his income of £7 a year. It availed him nothing. Gilbert is said to have been rather a theorist than a sound practician; and Robert, though a skilled farmer, cared nothing for business, and left him a free hand in the conduct of affairs. Luck, too, was against them from the first; and very soon the elder's genius was revealed to him, and he had other than farmer's work to do. 'In spite of the Devil,' he writes, 'the world, and the flesh, I believe I should have been a wise man; but the first year, from unfortunately buying in bad seed, the second, from a late harvest, we lost half of both our crops.' Naturally, 'this' (and some other things) 'overset all my wisdom, and I returned, "like the dog to his vomit"—(be it remembered, it is Robert Burns who speaks: not I)—"and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing

Failure and ill-luck.

in the mire."' That the confession, with its rather swaggering allusion to the Armour business, was true, is plain. But we do not need Burns's assurance to know that, though he could do his work, and prided himself on the straightness of his furrows, he was scarce cut out for a successful farmer—except, it may be, in certain special conditions. Endurance, patience, diligence, a devout attention to one's own interest and the land's, an indomitable constancy in labour to certain ends and in thought on certain lines—these are some of the qualities which make the husbandman; and, this being so, how should Mossgiel have prospered under Rab the Ranter? His head was full of other things than crops and cattle. He was bursting with intelligence, ideas, the consciousness of capacity, the desire to take his place among men; and in Mauchline he found livelier friends[1] and greater opportunities than he had found elsewhere. Being a Scot,

An unsuccessful farmer.

[1] As his landlord, the lawyer Gavin Hamilton, to whom he dedicated the Kilmarnock Volume, and the story of whose wrangle with the Mauchline Kirk-Session (see Vol. i. pp. 147-152, 188, 378-9, *etc.*) is to some extent that of Burns's assault upon the Kirk (see Vol. ii. *Holy Willie's Prayer*, pp. 25-30, and Notes, pp. 320-324). Another was Robert Aitken, also a lawyer, by whom he was 'read into fame,' to whom he

he was instinctively a theologian; being himself, he was inevitably liberal-minded; born a peasant of genius, and therefore a natural rebel, he could not choose but quarrel with the Kirk—especially as her hand was heavy on his friends and himself, —and it was as a Mauchline man that the best of his anti-clerical work was done.[1] Then, too, he was full of rhymes, and they

dedicated *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, and whom he celebrated in an Epitaph (Vol. i. p. 188). Yet another was Richmond, the lawyer's clerk, whose room he was afterwards to share in Edinburgh, and who appears to be partly responsible for the preservation of *The Jolly Beggars*. Again, there was the Bachelors' Club, on the model of that he had founded at Tarbolton, for whose edification, and in explanation of whose function, he appears to have written *The Fornicator* and *The Court of Equity*. This last is Burns's idea of what the proceedings of the Kirk-Session ought, in certain cases, to have been. It is capital fun, but something too frank and too particular for latter-day print.

[1] He was ever a theological liberal and a theological disputant—a champion of Heterodoxy, in however mild a form, whose disputations made him notorious, so that his name was as a stumbling-block and an offence to the Orthodox. For the series of attacks which he delivered against the Kirk—*The Holy Fair*, the *Address to the Deil*, *The Twa Herds*, *The Ordination*, *Holy Willie*, *The Kirk's Alarm*, the Epistles *To The Unco Guid* and *To John Goldie*—see Vols. i and ii. (Text and Notes). There is no record of an appearance on the stool with Paton; but the circumstances of this his initial difficulty appear to be set forth in the *Epistle to Rankine* (i. 155) and the *Reply to a Trimming Epistle* (ii. 96), with the Notes thereto appended. All these read, considered, and

must out of him: his call had come, and he fell to obeying it with unexampled diligence. More than all, perhaps, he had the temperament of the *viveur*—the man who rejoices to live his life; and his appetites had been intensified, his gift of appreciation made abnormal (so to say), by a boyhood and an adolescence of singular hardship and quite exceptional continence. It is too late in the world's history to apologise for the primordial instinct; and to do so at any time were sheer impertinence and unreasoning ingratitude. To apologise in the case of a man who so exulted in its manifestations and results, and who so valiantly, not to say riotously, insisted on the fact of that exultation, as Robert Burns, were also a rank and frank absurdity. On this point he makes doubt impossible. The 'white flower of a blameless life' was never a button-

digested, what interest remains in Burns's quarrel with the Kirk consists in the fact that, being a person naturally and invincibly opposed to the 'sour-featured Whiggism' on which the Stuarts had wrecked themselves, Burns was naturally and invincibly a Jacobite. His Jacobitism was, he said, 'by way of *vive la bagatelle*.' He told Ramsay of Auchtertyre that he owed it to the plundering and unhousing (1715) of his grandfather, who was gardener to Earl Marischal at Inverurie (*sic*). But it came to him mainly through Gavin Hamilton (who was Episcopalian by descent) and his own resentment of clerical tyranny.

hole for *him*:[1] his utterances, published and unpublished, are there to show that he would have disdained the presumption that it ever could have been. And it is from Mauchline, practically, that, his affair with Betty Paton over and done with, and, to anticipate a little, his affair with Jean Armour left hanging in the wind, he starts on his career as amorist at large.

Narrative.

And now for a little narrative. In the November of 1784 Elizabeth Paton bore him a daughter: 'the First Instance,' so he wrote above his *Welcome*, 'that entitled him to the Venerable Appellation of Father.' The mother is described as 'very plain-

[1] It is true that he wrote thus 'To a Young Friend':—

'The sacred lowe o' weel-plac'd love,
Luxuriantly indulge it;
But never tempt th' illicit rove,
Tho' naething should divulge it:
I waive the quantum o' the sin,
The hazard of concealing;
But, och! it hardens a' within,
And petrifies the feeling!'

But there is plenty to show that the writer was a great deal better at preaching than at practice. And he owns as much himself in his own epitaph:—

'Is there a man, whose judgment clear
Can others teach the course to steer,
Yet runs, himself, life's mad career
Wild as the wave?—
Here pause—and, thro' the starting tear,
Survey this grave.'

looking,' but of 'an exceedingly handsome figure'; 'rude and uncultivated to a great degree,' with a 'strong masculine understanding, and a thorough, though unwomanly, contempt for any sort of refinement'; withal, 'so active, honest, and independent a creature' that Mrs. Burns would have had Robert marry her, but 'both my aunts and Uncle Gilbert opposed it,' in the belief that 'the faults of her character would soon have disgusted him.' There had been no promise on his part; and though the reporter (his niece, Isabella Begg) has his own sister's warrant—(Mrs. Begg, by the way, was rather what her brother, in a mood of acute fraternal piety, might possibly have called 'a bletherin' b—tch')—for saying that 'woman never loved man with a more earnest devotion than that poor woman did him,' he in nowise sentimentalised about her. She is identified with none of his songs; and while there is a pleasant reference to her in the *Welcome*:—

'Thy mither's person, grace, and merit':—

she is recognisably the 'paitrick' of the *Epistle to Rankine*, she is certainly the heroine of *The Fornicator*, she probably does duty in the *Reply to a Trimming*

Epistle, none of which pieces shows the writer's 'penchant à l'adorable,' *etc.*, to advantage. No doubt, they were addressed to men. No doubt, too, they were, first and last, satirical impeachments of the Kirk: impeachments tinctured with the peasant's scorn of certain existing circumstances, and done with all the vigour and the *furia* which one particular peasant—a peasant who could see through shams and was intolerant of them—could with both hands bestow. And that the women did not resent their share in such things is shown by the fact that such things got done. It was 'the tune of the time'—in the peasant-world at least. Still, as Diderot says somewhere or other:—'On aime celle à qui on le donne, on est aimé de celle à qui on le prend.' And one can't help regretting that there are few or none but derisive references to Betty Paton in her lover's work.

IV

The Poet's Muse.

OF vastly greater importance than his mistresses, at this or any period of his life, is the entity, which, with an odd little touch of Eighteenth Century formality, he loved to call his Muse. That entity

was now beginning to take shape and substance as a factor in the sum of the world's happiness; and the coming of that other entity in whose existence he took so high a pride and so constant a delight—I mean 'the Bard'—was but a matter of time. Burns had been ever a rhymester; and Burns, who, as Stevenson observed, and as the Notes to these Volumes have shown, 'was always ready to borrow the hint of a design, as though he had some difficulty in commencing,' had begun by borrowing his style, as well as divers hints of designs, from stall-artists and neighbour-cuckoos. But, once emancipated, once a man, once practically assured of the primal concerns of life, once conscious that (after all) he might have the root of the matter in him, the merely local poet begins to waver and dislimn, and the Burns of *Poor Mailie* (written at Lochlie) and the *Epistle to Davie* reigns —intermittently, perhaps, but obviously— in his stead. It is all over with stall-artists and neighbour-cuckoos. Poor Fergusson's book[1] has fallen in his hands, and (as he

[1] Robert Fergusson (1750-1774) was certainly a prime influence in Burns's poetical life. Nevertheless—or shall I say consequently?—he has had less than justice from the most of Burns's Editors. Yet in his way he was so remarkable a

says in his ridiculous way) has 'caused him to string anew his wildly-sounding rustic lyre with emulating vigour.' At last the hour of the Vernacular Muse has come; and he is hip to haunch with such adepts in her mystery as the Sempills, and Hamilton

The influence of Fergusson.

creature that there can be no question but in his death, at four-and-twenty, a great loss was inflicted on Scottish literature. He had intelligence and an eye, a right touch of humour, the gifts of invention and observation and style, together with a true feeling for country and city alike; and his work in the Vernacular (his English verse is rubbish), with its easy expressiveness, its vivid and unshrinking realism, and a merit in the matter of character and situation which makes it—not readable only, but—interesting as art, at the same time that it is valuable as history, is nothing less than memorable: especially in the view of the miserable circumstances—(the poor lad was a starveling scrivener, and died, partly of drink, in the public madhouse)—in which it was done. Burns, who learned much from Fergusson, was an enthusiast in his regard for him; bared his head and shed tears over 'the green mound and the scattered gowans' under which he found his exemplar lying in Canongate Churchyard; got leave from the managers to put up a headstone at his own cost there, and wrote an epitaph to be inscribed upon it, one line of which—

'No storied urn nor animated bust,'

is somehow to be read in Gray's *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*. Fergusson was as essentially an Edinburgh product—(the old Scots capital: gay, squalid, drunken, dirty, lettered, venerable: lives in his verses much as Burns knew it twelve years after his death)—as the late R. L. S. himself; and, while I write, old memories come back to me of the admiring terms: terms half-playful, half-affectionate: in which the later artist was wont to speak of his all but forgotten ancestor.

of Gilbertfield, and Allan Ramsay, and Robert Fergusson, and the innominates whose verses, decent or not, have lived in his ear since childhood; catching their tone and their sentiment; mastering their rhythms; copying their methods; considering their effects in the one true language of his mind.[1] He could write deliberate English, and, when he wanted to be not so much sincere as impressive and 'fine,' he wrote English deliberately, as the worse and weaker part of his achievement remains to prove. He could even write English, as Jourdain talked prose, 'without knowing it'—as we know from *Scots Wha Hae*. He read Pope, Shenstone, Beattie, Goldsmith, Gray, and the rest, with so much enthusiasm that one learned Editor has made an interesting little list of pilferings from the works of these distinguished beings. But, so far as I can see, he might have lived and died an English writing Scot, and nobody been a thrill or a memory the better for his work. It is true that much

English and the Vernacular.

[1] I do not forget that Dugald Stewart noted the correctness of his speech and the success with which he avoided the use of Scotticisms. But in his day Scots was, not an accent but, a living tongue; and he certainly could not have talked at Mauchline and at Dumfries as he did in a more or less polite and Anglified Edinburgh.

of the *Saturday Night* and the *Vision* and the *Mountain Daisy* is written in English;[1] but one may take leave to wonder if these pieces, with so much else of Burns's own, would have escaped the 'iniquity of Oblivion,' had they not chanced, to their good fortune, to be companioned with *Halloween*, and *Holy Willie*, and *The Farmer to His Auld Mare*, and a score of masterpieces besides, in which the Vernacular is carried to the highest level—in the matter of force and fire, and brilliancy of diction, and finality of effect, to name but these—it has ever reached

[1] He contrives a compromise, to admirable purpose, too, in *Tam o' Shanter*: which is written partly in English and partly in the Vernacular. But (1) *Tam o' Shanter* is in a rhythmus classical in Scotland since the time of Barbour's *Bruce*; (2) the English parts of *Tam o' Shanter* are of no particular merit as *poetry*—that is, 'the only words in the only order'; and (3) the best of *Tam o' Shanter* is in the Vernacular alone. Contrast, for instance, the diabolical fire and movement and energy of these lines:—

> 'They reeled, they set, they cross'd, they cleekit,
> Till ilka carlin swat and reekit,
> And coost her duddies to the wark,
> And linket at it in her sark':—

with another famous—perhaps too famous—passage:—

> 'But pleasures are like poppies spread:
> You seize the flower, its bloom is shed,' *etc.*

In the second the result is merely Hudibrastic. In the first the suggestion—of mingled fury and stink and motion and heat and immitigable ardour—could only have been conveyed by the Vernacular Burns.

in verse.[1] Let this be as it may: there can be no question that when Burns wrote English he wrote what, on his own confession, was practically a foreign tongue—a tongue in which he, no more than Fergusson or Ramsay, could express himself to any sufficing purpose; but that, when he used the dialect which he had babbled in babyhood, and spoken as boy and youth and man—the tongue, too, in which the chief exemplars

A foreign tongue.

[1] It was Wordsworth's misfortune that, being in revolt against Augustan ideals and a worn-out poetic slang, he fell in with Burns, and sought to make himself out of common English just such a vocabulary as Burns's own. For he forgot that the Vernacular, in which his exemplar achieved such surprising and delectable results, had been a *literary* language for centuries when Burns began to work in it—that Burns, in fact, was handling with consummate skill a tool whose capacity had been long since proved by Ramsay and Fergusson and the greater men who went before them; and, having no models to copy, and no verbal inspiration but his own to keep him straight, he came to immortal grief, not once but many times. It is pretended, too, that in the matter of style Burns had a strong influence on Byron. But had he? Byron praises Burns, of course; but is there ever a trace of Burns the lyrist in the Byron songs? Again, the Byron of *Childe Harold* and the tales was as it were a Babel in himself, and wrote Scott *plus* Coleridge *plus* Moore *plus* Beattie and Pope and the Augustan Age at large; while the Byron of *Beppo* and the *Vision* and *Don Juan* approves himself the master of a style of such infernal brilliancy and variety, of such a capacity for ranging heaven-high and hell-deep, that it cannot without absurdity be referred to anything except the fact that he also was a born great writer.

and the ruling influences of his poetical life had wrought—he at once revealed himself for its greatest master since Dunbar.[1] More, much more, than that: his bearings once found, he marked his use of it by the discovery of a quantity hitherto unknown in literature. Himself, to wit: the amazing compound of style and sentiment with gaiety and sympathy, of wit and tenderness with

[1] For that is what it comes to in the end. He may seem to have little to do with Catholic and Feudal Scotland, and as little with the Scotland of the Early Reformation and the First Covenant. Also, it is now impossible to say if he knew any more of Scott and Dunbar and the older makers (Davie Lindsay and Barbour excepted) than he found in *The Ever Green*, which Ramsay garbled out of *The Bannatyne MS.*, if he were read in Pinkerton (1786), or if he got much more out of Gawain Douglas than the verse which serves as a motto to *Tam o' Shanter*: though a letter to Cleghorn shows that he certainly possessed a copy of that poet before 1796. The Scotland he represents, and of which his verses are the mirror, is the Scotland out of which the 'wild Whigs' crushed the taste for everything but fornication and theology and such expressions of derision and revolt as *Jenny M'Craw* and *Errock Brae*: the Scotland whose literary beginnings date, you'd fancy, not from Henryson, not from Dunbar and Douglas and the Lyon King-at-Arms, but from Sempill of Beltrees and the men who figure in the three issues of Watson's *Choice Collection*. But Ramsay and his fellows were a revival—not a new birth. The Vernacular School is one and indivisible. There are breaks in the effect; but the tradition remains unbroken. And Burns, for all his comparative modernity, descends directly from, and is, in fact, the last of that noble line which begins with Robert Henryson.

radiant humour and an admirable sense of art, which is Robert Burns.

His fustian.

He could write ill, and was capable of fustian. But, excepting in his 'Epigrams' and 'Epitaphs' and in his imitations of poets whose methods he did not understand, he was nearly always a great writer, and he was generally (to say the least) incapable of fustian in the Vernacular. In essaying the effects of Pope and Shenstone and those other unfamiliars, he was like a man with a personal hand set to imitate a writing-master's copy: he made as good a shot as he could at it, but there was none of himself in the result. It was otherguess work when he took on the methods and the styles in which his countrymen had approved themselves: these he could compass so well that he could far surpass his exemplars technically, and could adequately express the individual Burns besides. The *Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie* (written at Lochlie, and therefore very early work) trace back to Gilbertfield's *Bonnie Heck*; but the older piece is realistic in purpose and brutal in effect, while in the later—to say nothing of the farce in Hughoc—the whole philosophy of life of a decent mother-

The individual Burns.

ewe is imagined with delightful humour, and set forth in terms so kindly in spirit and so apt in style, that the *Death and Dying Words* is counted one of the imperishables in English letters. Contrast, again, the *Elegy*, written some time after the *Death and Dying Words*, on this immortal beast, with its exemplars in Watson and Ramsay :— The *Elegy*.

'He was right nacky in his way,
An' eydent baith be night and day;
He wi' the lads his part could play
When right sair fleed,
He gart them good bull-sillar pay;
But now he 's dead. . . .'

'Wha 'll jow Ale on my drouthy Tongue,
To cool the heat of Lights and Lung?
Wha 'll bid me, when the Kaile-bell 's rung,
To Buird me speed? . . .
Wha 'll set me by the Barrel-bung?
Since Sanny 's dead? . . .'

'He was good Company at Jeists,
And wanton when he came to Feasts;
He scorn'd the Converse of great Beasts
[F]or a Sheep's-head;
He leugh at Stories about Ghaists—
Blyth Willie 's dead':—

and you shall find the difference still more glaring. Cleverness apart—cleverness and

the touch of life, the element of realism—the Laments for Hab Simson and Sanny Briggs, for John Cowper and Luckie Wood and the Writer Lithgow,[1] are merely squalid and cynical; while in every line the *Elegy*, in despite of realism and the humorous tone and intent (essential to the models and therefore inevitable in the copy) is the work of a writer of genius, who is also a generous human being.[2] Very early work, again, are *Corn Rigs* and *Green Grow the Rashes*; in suggestion, inspiration, technical quality, both are unalterably Scots; and in both

[1] All five, together with Ramsay's on Luckie Spence (an Edinburgh bawd) and *Last Words of a Wretched Miser*, should be read for the sake of their likeness, and at the same time their unlikeness, to not a little in Burns, and in illustration of the truth that the Vernacular tradition was one of humorous, and even brutal realism. I have cited R. L. S. in connection with Fergusson. He had a far higher esteem for that maker than he had for that maker's ancestor, Allan Ramsay. Yet he quoted to me one day a stanza from the *John Cowper*, a certain phrase in which—a phrase obscenely significant of death—was, we presently agreed, as good an example of 'the Squalid-Picturesque' as could be found out of Villon.

[2] His suppression of such an old-fashioned touch in the first draft as this one :—

'Now Robin greetan chows the hams
Of Mailie dead' :—

is significant. It is quite in the vein of *Bonnie Heck*, as indeed are the first four stanzas. But it would have ruined the *Elegy* as the world has known it since 1786.

the effect of mastery and completeness is of those that defy the touch of Time. To compare these two and any two of Burns's songs in English, or pseudo-English, is to realise that the poet of these two should never have ventured outside the pale of his supremacy. English had ten thousand secrets which he knew not, nor could ever have known, except imperfectly; for he recked not of those innumerable traditions, associations, connotations, surprises, as it were ambitions, which make up the romantic and the literary life of words—even as he was penetrated and possessed by the sense of any such elements as may have existed in the Vernacular. Thus, if he read Milton, it was largely, if not wholly, with a view to getting himself up as a kind of Tarbolton Satan. He was careless, so I must contend, of Shakespeare. With such knowledge as he could glean from song-books, he was altogether out of touch with the Elizabethans and the Carolines. Outside the Vernacular, in fact, he was a rather unlettered Eighteenth Century Englishman, and the models which he must naturally prefer before all others were academic, stilted, artificial, and unexemplary to the highest

Scots and English.

point. It may be that I read the verse of Burns, and all Scots verse, with something of that feeling of 'preciousness' which everybody has, I take it, in reading a language, or a dialect, not his own: the feeling which blinds one to certain sorts of defect, and gives one an uncritical capacity for appreciating certain sorts of merit. However this be, I can certainly read my mother-tongue; and most Englishmen—with, I should imagine, many Scots—will agree with me in the wish that Burns, for all the brilliant compromise between Scots and English which is devised and done in *Tam o' Shanter* and elsewhere, had never pretended to a mastery which assuredly he had not, nor in his conditions ever could have had.

A natural development.

I have stressed this point because I wish to stress another, and with a view to making clear, and to setting in its proper perspective, the fact that, genius apart, Burns was, no miracle but, a natural development of circumstance and time. The fact is patent enough to all but them that, for a superstition's sake, insist on ignoring history, and decline to recognise the unchanging processes of natural and social Law. Without the

achievement of Æschylus, there can be no such perfection as Sophocles: just as, that perfection achieved, the decline of Tragedy, as in Euripides, is but a matter of time. But for the Middle Ages and the reaction against the Middle Ages there could have been no Ronsard, no Rabelais, no Montaigne in France. Had there been no Surrey and no Marlowe, no Chaucer and no Ovid (to name no more than these in a hundred influences), who shall take on himself to say the shape in which we now should be privileged to regard the greatest artist that ever expressed himself in speech? It is in all departments of human energy as in the eternal round of nature. There can be no birth where there is no preparation. The sower must take his seedsheet, and go afield into ground prepared for his ministrations; or there can be no harvest. The Poet springs from a compost of ideals and experiences and achievements, whose essences he absorbs and assimilates, and in whose absence he could not be the Poet. This is especially true of Burns. He was the last of a school. It culminated in him, because he had more genius, and genius of a finer, a rarer, and a more generous quality, than

The last of a school.

all his immediate ancestors put together. But he cannot fairly be said to have contributed anything to it except himself. He invented none of its forms; its spirit was not of his originating; its ideals and standards of perfection were discovered, and partly realised, by other men; and he had a certain timidity, as it were a *fainéantise*, in conception—a kind of unreadiness in initiative—which makes him more largely dependent upon his exemplars than any great poet has ever been. Not only does he take whatever the Vernacular School can give in such matters as tone, sentiment, method, diction, phrase; but also, he is content to run in debt to it for suggestions as regards ideas and for models in style. Hamilton of Gilbertfield and Allan Ramsay conventionalise the Rhymed Epistle; and he accepts the convention as it left their hands, and produces epistles in rhyme which are glorified Hamilton-Ramsay. Fergusson writes *Caller Water*, and *Leith Races*, and *The Farmer's Ingle*, and *Planestanes and Causey*, and the *Ode to the Gowdspink*; and he follows suit with *Scotch Drink*, and the *Saturday Night*, and *The Holy Fair*, and *The Brigs of Ayr*, and the *Mouse* and the *Mountain Daisy*.

His debt to others.

Sempill of Beltrees starts a tradition with *The Piper of Kilbarchan*; and his effect is plain in the elegies on Tam Samson and Poor Mailie. Ramsay sees a Vision, and tinkers old, indecent songs, and writes comic tales in glib octo-syllabics; and instinctively and naturally Burns does all three. It is as though some touch of rivalry were needed to put him on his mettle:[1] as though, instead of writing and caring for himself alone—(as Keats and Byron did, and Shelley; new men all, and founders of dynasties, not final expressions of sovranty)—to be himself he must still be emulous of some one else. This is not written as a reproach; it is stated as a fact. On the strength of that fact one cannot choose but abate the old, fantastic estimate of Burns's originality. But origin-

His need of rivalry.

[1] It was with '*emulating* vigour' that he strung his 'wildly-sounding rustic lyre'; and he read Ramsay and Fergusson not 'for servile imitation' but 'to kindle at their flame.' Another instance, or rather another suggestion, from himself, and I have done. It 'exalted,' it 'enraptured' him 'to walk in the sheltered side of a wood, or high plantation, in a cloudy winter day,' and hear the wind roaring in the trees. Then was his 'best season for devotion,' for then was his mind 'rapt up in a kind of enthusiasm to Him who . . . "walks on the wings of the wind."' The 'rapture' and the 'exaltation' are but dimly and vaguely reflected in his *Winter*. But if some ancestor had tried to express a kindred feeling, then had *Winter* been a masterpiece.

ality (to which, by the way, he laid no claim) is but one element in the intricately formed and subtly ordered plexus, which is called genius; and I do not know that we need think any the less of Burns for that it is not predominant in him. Original or not, he had the Vernacular and its methods at his fingers' ends. He wrote the heroic couplet (on the Dryden-Pope convention) clumsily, and without the faintest idea of what it had been in Marlowe's hands, without the dimmest foreshadowing of what it was presently to be in Keats's; he had no skill in what is called 'blank verse'—by which I mean the metre in which Shakespeare triumphed, and Milton after Shakespeare, and Thomson and Cowper, each according to his lights, after Shakespeare and Milton; he was a kind of hob-nailed Gray in his use of choric strophes and in his apprehension of the ode. But he entered into the possession of such artful and difficult stanzas as that of Montgomerie's *Banks of Helicon* and his own favourite sextain as an heir upon the ownership of an estate which he has known in all its details since he could know anything. It was fortunate for him and for his book, as it was fortunate for the world

Master of the Vernacular.

at large—as, too, it was afterwards to be fortunate for Scots song—that he was thus imitative in kind and thus traditional in practice. He had the sole ear of the Vernacular Muse; there was not a tool in her budget of which he was not master; and he took his place, the moment he moved for it, not so much, perhaps, by reason of his uncommon capacity[1] as, because he discovered himself to his public in the very terms—of diction, form, style, sentiment even—with which that public was familiar from of old, and in which it was waiting and longing to be addressed.

It was at Mossgiel that the enormous possibilities in Burns were revealed to Burns himself; and it was at Mossgiel that he did nearly all his best and strongest work. The revelation once made, he stayed not in his course, but wrote masterpiece after masterpiece, with a rapidity, an assurance, a com-

[1] In the same way Byron sold four or five editions of the *English Bards*, because it was written on a convention which was as old as Bishop Hall, and had been used by every satirist from the time of that master down to Mathias and Gifford. If he had cast his *libellus* into the octaves of *Don Juan*, the strong presumption is that it would have fallen still-born from the press. Other cases in point are Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and Browning: the manner of each was new, and not all have reached the general yet.

mand of means, a brilliancy of effect, which make his achievement one of the most remarkable in English letters. To them that can rejoice in the Vernacular his very titles are enough to recall a little special world of variety and character and delight: the world, in fact, where you can take your choice among lyrical gems like *Corn Rigs* and *Green Grow the Rashes* and *Mary Morison* and masterpieces of satire like *Holy Willie* and the *Address to the Unco Guid*. To this time belong *The Jolly Beggars* and *Halloween* and *The Holy Fair*; to this time the *Louse* and the *Mouse*, the *Auld Mare* and the *Twa Dogs*; to this time, *Scotch Drink* and the *Address to the Deil*, the *Earnest Cry* and the *Mountain Daisy*, the *Epistles* to Smith and Rankine and Sillar and Lapraik, the *Elegies* on Tam Samson and the never-to-be-forgotten Mailie, the *Reply* to a Tailor and the *Welcome* and the *Saturday Night*. In some, as *The Ordination*, *The Holy Tulyie*, and, despite an unrivalled and inimitable picture of drunkenness, *Hornbook* itself, with others in a greater or less degree, the interest, once you have appreciated the technical quality as it deserves, is very largely local

His titles.

and particular.[1] In others, as the *Saturday Night* and *The Vision* (after the first stanzas of description), it is also very largely sentimental; and in both these it is further vitiated by the writer's 'falling to his English,' to a purpose not exhilarating to the student of Shakespeare and Milton and Herrick. But all this notwithstanding, and notwithstanding quite a little crowd of careless rhymes, the level of excellence is one that none but the born great writer can maintain. Bold, graphic, variable, expressive, packed with observations and ideas, the phrases go ringing and glittering on through verse after verse, through stave after stave, through poem after poem, in a way that makes the reading of this peasant a peculiar pleasure for the student of style.[2] And if,

The level of excellence.

[1] There is a sense in which the most are local—are parochial even. In *Holy Willie* itself the type is not merely the Scots Calvinistic pharisee: it is a particular expression of that type; the thing is a local satire introducing the 'kail and potatoes' of a local scandal. Take, too, *The Holy Fair*: the circumstances, the manners, the characters, the experience—all are local. Apply the test to almost any—not forgetting the *Tam o' Shanter* which is the top of Burns's achievement—and the result is the same.

[2] It is not, remember, for 'the love of lovely words,' not for such perfections of human utterance as abound in Shakespeare:—

'Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy':—

with an eye for words and effects in words, that student have also the faculty of laughter, then are his admiration and his pleasure multiplied ten-fold. For the master-quality of Burns, the quality which has gone, and will ever go, the furthest to make him universally and perennially acceptable—acceptable in Melbourne (say) a hundred years hence as in Mauchline a hundred years syne—is humour. His sentiment is sometimes strained, obvious, and

Humour his master-quality.

in Milton :—

'Now to the moon in wavering morrice move':—

in Keats :—

'And hides the green hill in an April shroud':—

in Herrick :—

'Ye have been fresh and green,
Ye have been filled with flowers,
And ye the walks have been
Where maids have spent their hours':—

that we revert to Burns. Felicities he has—felicities innumerable; but his forebears set themselves to be humorous, racy, natural, and he could not choose but follow their lead. The Colloquial triumphs in his verse as nowhere outside the *Vision* and *Don Juan*; but for Beauty we must go elsewhither. He has all manner of qualities: wit, fancy, vision of a kind, nature, gaiety, the richest humour, a sort of homespun verbal magic. But, if we be in quest of Beauty, we must e'en ignore him, and 'fall to our English': of whose secrets, as I have said, he never so much as suspected the existence, and whose supreme capacities were sealed from him until the end.

deliberate—as might be expected of the poet who foundered two pocket-copies of that very silly and disgusting book, *The Man of Feeling*; and it often rings a little false, as in much of the *Saturday Night*. But his humour—broad, rich, prevailing, now lascivious or gargantuan and now fanciful or jocose, now satirical and brutal and now instinct with sympathy, is ever irresistible. Holy Willie is much more vigorously alive in London, and Sydney, and Cape Town to-day than poor drunken old Will Fisher was in the Mauchline of 1785. That 'pagan full of pride,' the vigilant, tricksy, truculent, familiar, true-blue Devil lives ever in Burns's part pitying and fanciful, part humorous and controversial presentment; but he has long since faded out of his strongholds in the Kirk :—

> 'But fare-ye-weel, Auld Nickie-Ben,
> O, wad ye tak' a thocht, an' men',
> Ye aiblins micht—I dinna ken—
> Still hae a stake!
> I 'm wae to think upon yon den,
> Ev'n for your sake.'

Lockhart, ever the true Son of the Manse, was so misguided—so mansified, to coin a word—as to wish that Burns had written a

Holy Fair in the spirit and to the purpose of *The Cotter's Saturday Night.* But the bright, distinguishing qualities of *The Holy Fair* are humour and experience and sincerity; the intent of the *Saturday Night* is idyllic and sentimental, as its effect is laboured and unreal; and I, for my part, would not give my *Holy Fair*, still less my *Halloween* or my *Jolly Beggars*—observed, selected, excellently reported—for a wilderness of *Saturday Nights.* It is not hard to understand that (given the *prestance* of its author) the *Saturday Night* was doomed to popularity from the first:[1] being of its essence sentimental and therefore pleasingly untrue, and being, also of its essence, patriotic—an assertion of the honour and the glory and the piety of Scotland. But that any one with an eye for fact and an ear for verse should prefer its tenuity of inspiration and its poverty of rhythm and diction

The Cotter's Saturday Night.

[1] And such popularity! 'Poosie Nansie's'—(thus writes a friend, even as these sheets are passing through the press)—'or rather a house on the site of Poosie Nansie's, is, as you know, still a tavern. There is a large room (for parties) at the back. And what, think you, is the poem that, printed and framed and glazed, is hung in the place of honour on its walls? "*The Jolly Beggars*—naturally?" Not a bit of it. *The Cotter's Saturday Night*! Surrounded, too, by engravings depicting its choicest moments and its most affecting scenes.'

before the sincere and abounding humour and the notable mastery of means, before the plenitude of life and the complete accord of design and effect, by which *Halloween*, and *The Holy Fair*, and nine-tenths of the early pieces in the Vernacular are distinguished, appears inexplicable. In these Burns is an artist and a poet: in the *Saturday Night* he is neither one nor other. In these, and in *Tam o' Shanter*, the Scots School culminates; as English Drama, with lyrical and elegiac English, culminates in *Othello* and the *Sonnets*, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and the *Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*: more gloriously far than the world would ever have wagered on its beginnings. It is the most individual asset in the heritage bequeathed by 'the Bard'; and still more, perhaps,[1] than the Songs, it stamps and keeps him the National Poet. The world it pictures—the world of 'Scotch morals, Scotch Religion, and Scotch drink'—may be ugly or not (as refracted through his temperament it is *not*). Ugly or not, how-

Tam o' Shanter.

[1] I say, 'perhaps,' because Burns, among the general at least, is better sung than read. But if the Songs, his own and those which are effects of a collaboration, be the more national, the Poems are the greater, and it is chiefly to the Poems that Burns is indebted for his place in literature.

ever, it was the world of Burns; to paint it was part of his mission; it lives for us in his pictures; and many such attempts at reconstruction as *The Earthly Paradise* and *The Idylls of the King* will 'fade far away, dissolve,' and be quite forgotten, ere these pictures disfeature or dislimn. He had the good sense to concern himself with the life he knew. The way of realism[1] lay broad-beaten by his ancestors, and was natural to

[1] It is claimed for him, with perfect truth, that he went straight to Nature. But the Vernacular makers seldom did anything else. An intense and abiding consciousness of the common circumstances of life was ever the distinguishing note of Scots Poetry. It thrills through Henryson, through Dunbar and the Douglas of certain 'Prologs' to *Eneados*, through Lindsay and Scott, through the nameless lyrist of *Peeblis at the Play* and *Christ's Kirk on the Green*, through much of *The Bannatyne MS.*, the Sempill of the *Tulchene Bischope*, the Montgomerie of the *Flyting* with Polwarth and of certain sonnets :—

'Raw reid herring reistit in the reik.'

It is even audible in the *Guid and Godlie Ballats*; and after the silence it is heard anew in the verse which was made despite the Kirk, and in the verse which proceeded from that verse—the verse, that is, of Ramsay and Fergusson and Burns. This vivid and curious interest in facts is, as I think, a characteristic of the 'perfervid ingyne.' Compare, for instance, Pitscottie and Knox on the murder of Cardinal Beaton. The one is something naïve, the other as it were Shakespearean; but in both the element of particularity is vital to the complete effect. These are two instances only; but I could easily give two hundred. To return to Burns and his

his feet; he followed it with vision, with humour, with 'inspiration and sympathy,' and with art; and in the sequel he is found to have a place of his own in the first flight of English poets after Milton, Chaucer, Shakespeare.

V

I TAKE it that Burns was not more multifarious in his loves than most others in whom the primordial instinct is of peculiar strength. But it was written that English literature—the literature of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Fielding—should be turned

His loves.

treatment of weather (say) and landscape. His verse is full of realities :—

'When lyart leaves bestrow the yird,
Or, wavering like the bauckie-bird,
Bedim cauld Boreas' blast;
When hailstanes drive wi' bitter skyte. . . .'

'The burn stealing under the lang, yellow broom. . . .'

'When, tumbling brown, the burn comes down. . . .'

'The speedy gleams the darkness swallowed. . . .'

'Yon murky cloud is foul with rain. . . .'

'November chill blaws loud wi' angry sugh':—

all exactly noted and vividly recorded (a very instructive instance is the 'burnie' stanza in *Halloween*; for he had, they say, a peculiar delight in running water). But for great, imaginative impressions :—

'Those green-robed senators of mighty woods,
Tall oaks branch-charmèd by the earnest stars':—

you turn to other books than his.

into a kind of schoolgirls' playground; so that careful Editors have done their best to make him even as themselves, and to fit him with a suit of practical and literary morals, which, if his own verse and prose mean anything, he would have refused, with all the contumely of which his 'Carrick lips' were capable, to wear. Nothing has exercised their ingenuity, their talent for chronology, their capacity for invention (even), so vigorously as the task of squaring their theory of Burns with the story of his marriage and the legend of his Highland Lassie. Now is the moment to deal with both.

Jean Armour.

Elizabeth Paton's child was born in the November of 1784. In the April of that year, a few weeks after the general settlement at Mossgiel, he made the acquaintance of Armour the mason's daughter, Jean. She was a handsome, lively girl; the acquaintance ripened into love on both sides; and in the end, after what dates approve a prolonged and serious courtship, Armour fell with child. Her condition being discovered, Burns, after some strong revulsions of feeling against—not Jean, I hope, but—the estate of marriage, gave her what he presently had every reason to call 'an unlucky paper,'

recognising her as his wife; and, had things been allowed to drift in the usual way, the world had lacked an unforgotten scandal, and a great deal of silly writing. This, though, was not to be. Old Armour—('a bit mason body, who used to snuff a guid deal, and gey af'en tak' a bit dram')—is said to have 'hated' Burns: so that he would 'reyther hae seen the Deil himsel' comin' to the hoose to coort his dochter than him.' Thus a contemporary of both Armour and Burns; and in any case Armour knew Burns for a needy and reckless man, the father of one by-blow, a rebel at odds with the Orthodox, of whom, in existing circumstances, it would be vain to ask a comfortable living. So he first obliged Jean to give up the 'unlucky paper,' with a view to unmaking any engagement it might confirm,[1] and then sent her to Paisley, to be out

[1] I take it that the paper was 'unlucky,' because it became a weapon in old Armour's hands, and was the means of inflicting on the writer the worst and the most painful experience of his life. At the same time there seems to be no doubt that it made Jean Mrs. Burns, so that, consciously or not, Auld (who probably had a strong objection to the marriage) was guilty of an illegal act in certifying Burns a bachelor. Burns, in fact, was completely justified in his anger with the Kirk and in the scorn with which he visited the tyranny of her ministers.

of her lover's way. In the meanwhile Burns himself was in straits, and had half-a-dozen designs in hand at once. Mossgiel was a failure; he had resolved to deport himself to the West Indies; he had made up his mind to print, and the Kilmarnock Edition was setting, when Jean was sent into exile. Worst of all, he seems to have been not very sure whether he loved or not. When he knew that he and she had not eluded the Inevitable, he wrote to James Smith that 'against two things—staying at home and owning her conjugally'—he was 'fixed as fate.' 'The first,' he says, 'by heaven I will not do!' Then, in a burst of Don-Juanism —Don-Juanism of the kind that protests too much to be real—'the last, by hell I will never do.' Follows a gush of sentimentalism (to Smith), which is part nerves and part an attempt—as the run on the *g*'s and the *w*'s shows—at literature:—'A good God bless you, and make you happy, up to the warmest weeping wish of parting friendship.' And this is succeeded by a message to the poor, pregnant creature, of whom, but two lines before, he has sworn 'by hell' that he will never make her honest:—'If you see Jean, tell her I will meet her, so help me God in

A burst of Don-Juanism.

my hour of need.' This scrap is undated, but it must have been written before 17th February 1786, when he wrote thus to Richmond:—'I am extremely happy with Smith; he is the only friend I have *now* in Mauchline.' Well, he *does* meet Jean; and, his better nature getting the upper hand, the 'unlucky paper' is written. Then on the 20th March he writes thus to Muir:—'I intend to have a gill between us or a mutchkin stoup,' for the reason that it 'will be *a great comfort and consolation*':—which seems to show that Jean had repudiated him some time between the two letters. Before the 2nd April, on which day the Kirk-Session takes cognisance of the matter, Jean has gone to Paisley; the 'unlucky paper' is cancelled (apparently about the 14th April, the names were cut out with a penknife); so that Don Juan finds himself *planté-là*, and being not really Don Juan—(as what sentimentalist could be?)—he does not affect Don Juan any more. The prey has turned upon the hunter; the deserter becomes the deserted, the privilege of repudiation, 'by hell' or otherwise, has passed to the other side. The man's pride, inordinate for a peasant, is cut to the quick; and his un-

The deserter deserted.

rivalled capacity for 'battering himself into an affection' or a mood has a really notable opportunity for display. In love before, he is ten times more in love than ever; he feels his loss to desperation; be becomes the disappointed lover — even the true-souled, generous adoring victim of a jilt :—

> 'A jillet brak his heart at last
> That 's owre the sea.'

In effect, his position was sufficiently distracting. He had made oath that he would *not* marry Jean; then he had practically married her; then he found that nobody wanted her married to him— that, on the contrary, he was the most absolute 'detrimental' in all Ayrshire; when, of course, the marriage became the one thing that made his life worth living. He tried to persuade old Armour to think better of his resolve; and, failing, ran 'nine parts and nine tenths out of ten stark staring mad.' Also he wrote the *Lament*, in which he told his sorrows to the moon[1] (duly

The *Lament.*

[1] Is it worth noting that, later, when he comes to sing of Mary Campbell, his confidant is no longer the Moon but the Morning Star?

addressing that satellite as 'O thou pale Orb'), and took her publicly into his confidence, in the beautiful language of Eighteenth Century English Poetry, and painted what is in the circumstances a really creditable picture of the effects upon a simple Bard of 'a faithless woman's broken vow.' Further he produced *Despondency* in the same elegant lingo; and, in *Despondency*, having called for 'the closing tomb,' and pleasingly praised 'the Solitary's lot,'— and *Despondency.*

'Who, all-forgetting, all-forgot
Within his humble cell—
The cavern, wild with tangling roots—
Sits o'er his newly gathered fruits,
Beside his crystal well!' *etc.*—

he addressed himself to Youth and Infancy in these affecting terms :—

'O enviable early days,
When dancing thoughtless Pleasure's maze,
To care, to guilt unknown!
How ill exchang'd for riper times,
To feel the follies or the crimes
Of others, or my own!
Ye tiny elves that guiltless sport,
Like linnets in the bush,
Ye little know the ills ye court,
When manhood is your wish!

The losses, the crosses
That active man engage ;
The fears all, the tears all
Of dim declining Age!'[1]

'Ungrateful Armour.'

Moreover, he took occasion to refer to Jean (to David Brice; 12th June 1786) as 'poor, ill-advised, ungrateful Armour'; vowed that he could 'have no nearer idea of the place of eternal punishment' than 'what I have felt in my own breast on her account'; and finally confessed himself to this purpose:—'I have often tried to forget her: I have run into all kinds of dissipation and riot . . . to drive her out of my head,

[1] I cannot attach any great importance to these exercises in Poetic English. Burns wrote to a very different purpose when he wrote from his heart and in his native tongue :—

'Had we never loved sae kindly . . .'
'Of a' the airts the wind can blaw
I dearly like the west':—

and so on, and so on. Still, there can be no doubt that they mean something. At any rate they are designed to be impressive and 'fine'; and probably the Bard believed in them to the extent to which he was satisfied with his achievement in what must certainly have seemed to him real poetry. None of your Vernacular (that is), but downright, solid unmistakable English Verse: verse which might stand beside the works of Beattie and Shenstone and Thomson and the 'elegantly melting Gray.' That life departed them long since is plain. But it is just as plain that they meant something to Burns, for (apparently) he took much pains with them, saw not their humorous aspect, and included them in his first (Kilmarnock) Volume.

but all in vain.' Long before this, however —as early, it would seem, as some time in March—his 'maddening passions, roused to tenfold fury,' having done all sorts of dreadful things, and then 'sunk into a lurid calm,' he had 'subsided into the time-settled sorrow of the sable widower,' and had lifted his 'grief-worn eye to look for—another wife.' In other words, he had pined for female society, and had embarked upon those famous love-passages with Highland Mary.

Mary Campbell.

Little that is positive is known of Mary Campbell except that she once possessed a copy of the Scriptures (now very piously preserved at Ayr), and that she is the subject of a fantasy, in bronze, at Dunoon. But to consider her story is, almost inevitably, to be forced back upon one of two conclusions :—either (1) she was something of a lightskirts; or (2) she is a kind of Scottish Mrs. Harris. The theory in general acceptance—what is called the Episode Theory—is that she was 'an innocent and gentle Highland nursery-maid' (thus, after Chambers, R. L. S.) 'in the service of a neighbouring family' (Gavin Hamilton's); that she consoled Burns—*mais pour le bon motif*

—for Jean's desertion; that they agreed to marry; that, on her departure for the West to prepare for the event, 'Ayr, gurgling, kissed his pebbled shore,' and they exchanged vows and Bibles; and that she died, of a malignant fever, some few months after her return to Greenock. Another identifies her (on Richmond's authority) with a serving-maid in Mauchline, who was the mistress of a Montgomerie, and had withal such a hold upon Burns that for a brief while he was crazy to make her his wife; and some have thought that this may be the Mary Campbell who, according to the Dundonald Session Records, fathered a child on one John Hay. This last hypothesis is, of course, most hateful to the puzzle-headed puritans who cannot, or will not, believe, despite the fact that the world has always teemed with Antonies, each of them mad for his peculiar Cleopatra, that Burns, particularly in his present straits, might very well have been enamoured of a gay girl to the point of marriage. So, for the consolation of these, there has been devised a third, according to which her name was either Mary Campbell or something unknown; but, whatever she was called, she

Conflicting theories.

was so far and away the purest and sweetest of her sex—the one 'white rose,' in fact, which grew up among the 'passion flowers' of the Bard's career—that she must, had she married him, have entirely 'rectified' his character, and have transformed him into a pattern Kirk-of-Scotland puritan of the puritans. On the other hand, it has become obvious to some whole-hearted devotees of the Marian Ideal that a 'young person' of this sort could scarce have been of so coming a habit as to skip with alacrity into Jean's old shoes, and—shutting her innocent eyes to the fact that Burns, a man notoriously at war with the Kirk and the seducer of two unmarried women, was at the same time at his wits' end for cash—consent to cast in her lot with his at a moment's notice, and with never a sign from the family she was to enter. If she could do that, plainly she could not, except on strong positive testimony, be made to do duty as a white rose among passion-flowers; or if, on some unknown and inenarrable hypothesis, she could, then, says one of the devout, 'the conduct of Burns was that of a scoundrel.' This is absurd! So of late (1896-97) there has come into being a wish to believe that either

A white rose among passion-flowers.

Mary Campbell preceded Armour in the Bard's affections, or the Highland Lassie never existed at all, but was a creature of Burns's brain: an ideal of womanhood to which his thought ascended from the mire of this world—(the world of Ellisland, and Jean, and the children, and the songs in Johnson's *Museum*)—as Dante's to his Beatrice of dream. Given Burns's own habit and the habit of the Scots peasant woman, there is still no earthly reason for rejecting the Episode Theory—even were rejection possible—however seriously it reflect upon the morals of the parties concerned. But it is fair to add that the subject is both complicated and obscure. Burns's own references to his Highland Lassie are deliberately insignificant and vague: for once in his life he was reticent. His statement that she went home to prepare for their marriage is heavily discounted by the fact that he did not introduce her to his family as his betrothed, in nowise prepared for marriage on his own account, never dreamed, except in sporadic copies of verse, of taking her to the West Indies, and was all the while so desperately enamoured of Jean that not by any amount of self-indulgence could he rid

A creature of the brain.

his breast of her: by the fact, too, that, if his thought went back to the Highland Lassie in after years, his report of the journey is strongly tinctured with remorse.[1] Currie's statement is that 'the banks of Ayr formed the scene of youthful passions . . . the history of which it would be improper to reveal,' *etc.* Gilbert Burns, after noting that Nanie Fleming's charms were 'sexual'—'which indeed was the characteristic of the greater part of his (Robert's) mistresses'—is careful, perhaps with an eye on the heroine of *Thou Ling'ring Star*, to record the statement that Robert, at least, 'was no platonic lover, whatever he might pretend or suppose of himself to the contrary.' There is Richmond's statement, as reported by Train. There is the Mary Campbell of the Dundonald Register. There is the certainty that relations there were between Burns and a Mary Campbell. There is the strong probability that Mary Campbell and the Highland Lassie were one and the same person.

[1] He sent *Thou Ling'ring Star* to Mrs. Dunlop in a letter dated 8th November 1789. In acknowledging it, the lady noted its remorseful cast, and hoped it didn't set forth a personal experience. There is nothing to show that he gave her any particulars, or essayed to disabuse her of the idea that remorse there well might be.

There is Burns's own witness to the circumstance that they met and parted under extremely suspicious conditions. That, really, is all. Yet, on the strength of a romantic impulse on the part of Robert Chambers, the heroine-in-chief of Burns's story is not the loyal and patient soul whom he appreciated as the fittest to be his wife he'd ever met: not the Jean who endured his affronts, and mothered his children (her own and another's), and took the rough and the smooth, the best and the worst of life with him, and wore his name for well-nigh forty years after his death as her sole title to regard. On the contrary, that heroine-in-chief is a girl of whom scarce anything definite is known, while what may be reasonably suspected of her, though natural and feminine enough, is so displeasing to some fanatics, that, for Burns's sake (not hers) they would like to mythologise her out of being; or, at the least, to make her as arrant an impossibility as the tame, proper figmentary Burns, the coinage of their own tame, proper brains, which they have done their best to substitute for the lewd, amazing peasant of genius,[1] the inspired faun,

The heroine-in-chief.

[1] 'Peculiarly like nobody else' (R. B. to Arnot, April 1786).

whose voice has gone ringing through the courts of Time these hundred years and more, and is far louder and far clearer now than when it first broke on the ear of man.

Stevenson was an acute and delicate critic at many points: but he wrote like a novelist —like Thackeray, say, of Fielding and Sterne —when he wrote of Armour as a 'facile and empty-headed girl,' and insisted, still possessed by Chambers's vain imaginings, that she was first and last in love with another man. In truth the facility was on the other side. In 1784 Burns is willing to marry Betty Paton, and writes thus to Thomas Orr:—'I am very glad Peggy [Thomson] is off my hand, as I am at present embarrassed enough without her.' In 1785 he is courting Jean Armour, and very early in 1786 Jean is in the family way, and 'by hell' she shall never be his wife. But some time in March Jean is sent to Paisley; and the 'maddening passions,' *etc.*, set to work; and he can no more 'se consoler de son départ' than Calypso could for that of Ulysses. So in a hand's turn he becomes the stricken deer, and, as we have seen, protests (to the Moon) that to marry Jean, and wear 'The promised father's tender name' are his sole ambitions.

As Jean does not return, however, he seeks (and finds) such comfort as he may in exchanging vows and Bibles and what Chamfort called 'fantaisies' with Mary Campbell. On the 12th-13th May he writes *The Court of Equity*—a task the strangest conceivable for a lover, whether rejoicing or distraught. On the 14th 'Ayr gurgling kisses his pebbled shore,' and 'The flowers spring wanton to be pressed,' and Highland Mary leaves for the West to make these famous preparations. On the 15th May he dates (at least) the *Epistle to a Young Friend* :—

The Court of Equity.

> 'The sacred lowe o' weel-placed love
> Luxuriantly indulge it,' *etc.* :—

and, as for some time past, he is still the gallant, howbeit in jest, of Betty Miller: till on the 9th June 'poor ill-advised Armour' returns to Mauchline; and on the 12th he writes that 'for all her part in a certain black affair' he 'still loves her to distraction,' and, with a view to forgetting her has 'run into all kinds of dissipation and riot . . . but in vain.' On the 28th June he appears before 'the Poacher Court,' acknowledges paternity, and is 'promised a certificate as a single man': on condition

that he do penance before the congregation on three successive Sundays. On the 9th July, the occasion of his first appearance, he has 'a foolish hankering fondness' for Jean, but, calling on her and being put to the door, he remarks that she does not 'show that penitence that might have been expected'; so, on the 22nd, he executes a deed by which he makes over all his property to the 'wee image of his bonie Betty,' to the exclusion of whatever might come of his affair with the recusant. Then, on the 30th (old Armour having, meanwhile, got a warrant against him, and sent him into hiding[1]), he adjures Richmond—(who, he knows, will 'pour an execration' on Jean's head)—to 'spare the poor, ill-advised girl for my sake'; and on the 14th August he calls on Heaven to 'bless the Sex,' for that 'I feel there is still happiness for me among them.' Against this panorama of tumult and variety and adventure, enlarged in Edinburgh, and enriched at Ellisland and in Dumfries, there are to set the years of simple abnegation, magnanimity, and devotion with which the 'facile and empty-headed girl' repaid the husband of her choice. The conclusion is

A panorama of tumult.

[1] No doubt he retired on information sent by Jean.

obvious. The Novelist turned Critic is still the Novelist. Consciously or not, he develops preferences, for, consciously or not, he must still create.'[1] Stevenson's preferences were with Rab Mossgiel. And the result was a grave—but not, I hope, a lasting—injustice to an excellent and very womanly woman and a model wife.[2]

As to Highland Mary, one of two conclusions: (1) Either she was a paragon; or (2) she was not. In the first case, her story has yet to be written, and written on evidence

[1] Thus Stevenson, who himself liked 'dressing a part' (so to speak), was persuaded that Burns did likewise, and accepted bodily that absurd, fantastic story (told by two Englishmen), in which the Bard, in a fox-skin cap and an enormous coat, and girt with a Highland broadsword, is seen angling from a Nithside rock. Jean denied it, and said that Robert (who hated field-sports, as we know) never angled in his life. But the Novelist was roused; and all that was ignored.

[2] On the 3rd September Jean lay in of twins. They were presently taken by their respective grandmothers, to whom, I doubt not, they gave great joy: as in that and other stages of society the appearance of the third generation, whether its right to exist be legal or not, does always. Burns announced the event as only Burns could, by sending *Nature's Law* :—

> 'Kind Nature's care had given him share
> Large of the flaming current,' *etc.* :—

to Gavin Hamilton; a 'God bless the little dears'; with a snatch of indecent song, to Richmond, and a really heartfelt and affecting bit of prose on the subject of paternity to Robert Muir.

that is positive and irrefutable. In the second, the bronze at Dunoon bears abiding witness to the existence (at a certain time) of what can only be described as a national delusion.

VI

The Kilmarnock Volume.

BY this time the end of Mauchline, and of much besides, was nearer than Burns knew. Probably sent to press in the May of 1786, the Kilmarnock Volume was published at the end of July.[1] Most of,

[1] One effect of its publication was to secure him the friendship of Mrs. Dunlop. It is evident from this lady's letters that her interest in him could scarce have been warmer had he been her son. She prized his correspondence as beyond rubies, and as a rule he was slower to reply than she (once, being hurt by his silence, she told him she wouldn't write again till he asked her, and, failing to draw him, within a week she is found begging his pardon for her petulance). She made him many gifts—apparently in money and in kind—gifts at New Year and other times, and accepted gifts from him (once he sent her a keg of old brandy). Her influence made ever for decency, and it may well have been on her remonstrances, which were strong, that he finally resolved to remove some of the coarser phrases in his earlier editions. Her last (extant) letter is dated 11th January 1795. For some unexplained reasons she ceased from writing several months before the January of 1796. It may have been that she heard of him as often in drink, or that she was told of the affair at Woodley Park. In any case she esteemed him so highly, and admired him so lavishly, that 'tis quite impossible to believe the breach in the correspondence due to any fault of hers.

if not all, the numbers contained in it were probably familiar to the countryside. Some had certainly been received with 'a roar of applause'; Burns, who was not a man to hide his light under a bushel (his temperament was too radiant and too vigorous for that), was given to multiplying his verses in MS. copies for friends; he had been 'read into fame' by Aiken the lawyer: so that *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* was, in a sense, as 'well advertised' as book could be. Its triumph was not less instant than well-deserved:[1] the first issue, six hundred copies strong, was exhausted in a month ('tis said that not one could be spared for Mossgiel). But Burns himself, according to himself, and he was ever punctiliously exact and scrupulous on the score of money, was but £20 in pocket by it; the Kilmarnock printer declined to strike off a second impression, with additions, unless he got the price of the paper (£27) in advance;

Its triumph.

[1] 'Old and young,' says Heron, 'high and low, grave and gay, learned or ignorant, all were alike delighted, agitated, transported. I was at that time resident in Galloway, contiguous to Ayrshire: and I can well remember, how that even the plough-boys and maid-servants would have gladly bestowed the wages which they earned the most hardly, and which they wanted to purchase necessary clothing, if they might but secure the works of Burns.'

and for some time it seemed that there was nothing but Jamaica for the writer, Local Bard and Local Hero though he were: so that he looked to have sailed in mid-August, and again on the 1st September, and at some indeterminate date had 'conveyed his chest thus far on the road to Greenock,' and written that solemn and moving song—far and away the best, I think, and the sincerest thing he left in English—*The Gloomy Night is Gathering Fast.* It was to be the 'last effort' of his 'Muse in Caledonia.' But, for one or another reason, his departure was ever deferred; and, though on the 30th October (some ten days, it is surmised, after the death of Mary Campbell), he was still writing that 'ance to the Indies he was wonted,' he'd certainly contrive to 'mak' the best o' life Wi' some sweet elf,' on the 18th November, 'I am thinking for my Edinburgh expedition on Monday or Tuesday come s'ennight.' In effect, an 'Edinburgh expedition' was natural and inevitable. Ballantine of Ayr is said to have suggested the idea of such an adventure; Gilbert and the family are said to have applauded it. But as early as the 4th September the excellent Blacklock—(in 'a letter to a

An 'Edinburgh expedition.'

friend of mine which overthrew all my schemes')—had called—'for the sake of the young man'—for a second edition, 'more numerous than the former': inasmuch as 'it appears certain that its intrinsic merit, and the exertions of the author's friends, might give it a more universal circulation than anything of the kind which has been published within my memory.' Thus Blacklock; and the 'friend of mine,' which was Lawrie, the minister of Loudoun, had communicated Blacklock's letter to the person most concerned in Blacklock's suggestion. Bold, proud, intelligent *au possible*, strongly possessed too (so he says, and so I believe) by the genius of paternity, Burns the Man, who had a very becoming opinion of Burns the Bard, and could fairly appreciate that worthy's merits, must certainly have seen that in Edinburgh he had many chances of succeeding at the very point where the Kilmarnock printer failed him. I do not doubt, either, that he was tired of being the Local Poet, the Local Satirist, the Local Wit, the Local Lothario (even), and eager to essay himself on another and a vaster stage than Mauchline; for, if he hadn't been thus tired and thus eager, he wouldn't have been

Robert Burns. The fighting spirit, the genius of emulation, is so strong in us all that a man of temperament and brains must assert himself, and get accepted at his own (or another) valuation, exactly as a cock must crow. And I love to believe that Burns, being immitigably of this metal, entered upon his adventure—(27th November: on a borrowed nag, with not much money, a letter of introduction to Dalrymple of Orangefield, and a visiting list consisting entirely in Dugald Stewart and Richmond the lawyer's clerk)—with a joyous heart and the stiff neck of one who knows himself a man among men, and whose chief ambition is to 'drink delight of battle with his peers'—if he can find them.

His reception.

He reached the capital on the 28th November, and was hospitably entertained by Richmond—to the extent, indeed, of a bedfellow's share in the clerk's one little room in Baxter's Place, Lawnmarket. Through Dalrymple of Orangefield he got access to Lord Glencairn and others; among them Harry Erskine, Dean of Faculty, and that curious, irascible, pompous ass, the Earl of Buchan, and Creech the publisher, who had been Glencairn's tutor, and who

advertised the Edinburgh Edition on the 14th December. He was everywhere received as he merited, and he made such admirable use of his vogue that, five days before Creech's advertisement was printed, he could tell his friend and patron, Gavin Hamilton, that he was rapidly qualifying for the position of Tenth Worthy and Eighth Wise Man of the World. He saw everybody worth seeing, and talked with everybody worth talking to; he was made welcome by 'heavenly Burnett' and her frolic Grace of Gordon, and welcome by the ribald, scholarly, hard-drinking wits and jinkers of the Crochallan Fencibles, for whose use and edification he had made the unique and precious collection now called *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*; he moved and bore himself as easily at Dugald Stewart's as in Baxter's Place, in Creech's shop, with Henry Mackenzie and Gregory and Blair, as at that extraordinary meeting of the St Andrew's Lodge, where, at the Grand Master's bidding, the Brethren assembled drank the health of 'Caledonia and Caledonia's Bard—Brother Burns': a toast received with 'multiplied honours and repeated acclamations.' To look at, 'he was

like a farmer dressed to dine with the laird': his manners were 'rustic, not clownish'; he had 'a sort of dignified plainness and simplicity.' Then, 'his address to females was always extremely deferential, and always'—this on the authority of the Duchess of Gordon—'with a turn to the pathetic or humorous, which engaged their attention particularly.' For the rest, 'I never saw a man in company with his superiors in station and information more perfectly free from either the reality or the affectation of embarrassment.' Thus, long afterwards, Sir Walter, who noted also, boy as he was, 'the strong expression of sense and shrewdness in all his lineaments,' and who, long afterwards, had never seen such an eye as Burns's 'in a human head, though I have seen the most distinguished men'—(Byron among them; and Byron's eye was one of Byron's points)—'of my time.' It is not wonderful, perhaps, that Burns, with his abounding temperament, his puissant charm, his potency in talk, his rare gifts of eye and voice,[1]

His dignified simplicity.

[1] Thus Maria Riddell:—'His voice alone could improve upon the magic of his eye. Sonorous, replete with the finest modulations,' *etc.* It will be remembered that children used to speak of Byron as 'the gentleman with the beautiful voice.'

should have strongly affected Edinburgh Society, brilliant in its elements and distinguished in its effect as it was. There has been no Burns since Burns; or history would pretty certainly have repeated itself. What is really wonderful is the way in which Burns kept his head in Edinburgh Society, and stood prepared for the inevitable reaction. Through all the 'thick, strong, stupefying incense smoke' (and there was certainly a great deal of it), he held a steady eye upon his future. He saw most clearly that the life of a nine-days' wonder is at most nine days, and that now was his time or never. But if he expected preferment, he was neither extravagantly elated in anticipation, nor unduly depressed by disappointment; and, for all his self-consciousness—('And God had given his share')—he was not too platonic to disdain the favours of at least one servant-girl (he was arrested, August 1787, on a warrant *In meditatione fugæ*), nor too punctilious to make love to 'a Lothian farmer's daughter, a very pretty girl, whom I've almost persuaded to accompany me to the West Country should I ever return,' *etc.*, nor too philosophical not to regret his Jean, and

The reaction.

reflect (in this very letter to Gavin Hamilton) that he'd never 'meet so delicious an armful again.'

In the long-run his magnanimity suffered a certain change. The peasant at work scarce ever goes wrong; but abroad and idle he is easily spoiled, and soon. Edinburgh was a triumph for Burns; but it was also a misfortune. It was a centre of conviviality—a city of clubs and talk and good fellowship, a city of harlotry and high jinks, a city (above all) of drink:— Edinburgh a misfortune.

> 'Whare couthy chiels at e'enin meet,
> Their bizzin craigs and mou's to weet:
> An' blythely gar auld Care gae by
> Wi' blinket and wi' bleering eye':—

a dangerous place for a peasant to be at large in, especially a peasant of the conditions and the stamp of Burns. He was young, he was buckishly given, and he was—Burns. He had, as certain numbers in *The Merry Muses* witness, an entirely admirable talent of a kind much favoured by our liberal ancestors. To hear him talk was ever a privilege; while to hear him make such use as he might of this peculiar capacity cannot but have constituted a unique experience. After all, a gift's a gift, and a man must

use the gifts he has. No reasonable being can question that Burns used this one of his.[1] In those days he could scarce be buckish—or even popular and do other. Even in the country, says Heron, in his

[1] This is noted neither in praise nor in dispraise. It is noted to show that Burns was essentially a man of his time: as how, peasant of genius that he was, could he be anything else? Our fathers loved sculduddery, and Burns, who came from Carrick—where, as Lockhart has remarked, the Vernacular was spoken with peculiar gaiety and vigour—was the best gifted of them all in this respect by virtue of his genius, his turn of mind, his peasanthood, and his wonderful capacity for talk. Josiah Walker notes of Burns that his conversation was 'not more licentious' than the conversation heard at the tables of the great; Lockhart regrets that he can give but few of Burns's *mots*, for the reason that the most of those preserved and handed down were unquotable. It was a trick of the time, and long after—(remember Colonel Newcome's indignant retreat before old Costigan)—so that Lord Cork of *The Bumper Toast*, and Captain Morris at Carlton House and Burns among the Crochallan Fencibles are but expressions of the same fashion in humour, the same tendency in the human mind to apprehend and rejoice in the farce of sex. I do not know that Burns and M'Queen of Braxfield (Stevenson's Weir of Hermiston) ever met. But it was said of M'Queen that he had never read anything but sculduddery and law; and to Ramsay of Auchtertyre, in whom Sir Walter found some elements of Monkbarns, the two men seemed cast in the same mould. Burns, in any case, was a man of the later Eighteenth Century (he sent one of his best known *facetiæ* to Graham of Fintry, with a view to correcting some illiberal report about his politics); and to take him out of it, and essay to make him a smug, decent, Late-Victorian journalist is, as I think, to essay a task at once discreditable in aim and impossible of execution.

loose yet lofty way, 'the votaries of intemperate joys, with persons to whom he was recommended by licentious wit . . . had begun to fasten on him, and to seduce him to embellish the gross pleasures of their looser hours with the charms of his wit and fancy.' These temptations—(he was known, be it remembered, for the ribald of *The Fornicator* and *The Court of Equity* as well as for the poet of the *Mountain Daisy* and the *Saturday Night*)—he was by no means incapable of putting by. Mr. Arthur Bruce, indeed, 'a gentleman of great worth and discernment,' assured Heron that he had 'seen the poet steadily resist such solicitations and allurements to convivial enjoyment, as scarcely any other person could have withstood.' But—thus this author: intelligent, not unfriendly on the whole, on the whole competent—'the bucks of Edinburgh accomplished . . . that in which the boors of Ayrshire[1] had failed. After residing some months in Edinburgh he began to estrange himself, not altogether, but in some measure, from the society of his graver

The bucks of the capital.

[1] This appears to be a polite description, by a staunch (though drunken) Churchman, of those desperate spirits, Gavin Hamilton and Robert Aiken.

friends. . . . He *suffered* himself to be surrounded by a race of miserable beings who were proud to tell that they had been in company with Burns, and had seen Burns as loose and as foolish as themselves.'[1] One result of this condescension was this: always the best man in the room, 'the cock of the company,' as Heron puts it, 'he began to contract something of new arrogance in conversation'; till in the long-run 'he could scarcely refrain from indulging in similar freedom and dictatorial decision of talk, even in the presence of persons[2] who could less patiently endure his presumption.' Heron's detail is vague — not to say indefinite; his effect may be misleading. But, as I said, the peasant at large—the peasant without hard work to keep him straight—must, almost of necessity, run to waste. And it is plain that, treading thus closely on the heels of 'the dissipation and riot,'

'The cock of the company.'

[1] I give all this for what it is worth. Heron himself was something of a wastrel. Yet he had a clerical habit and a clerical bias which made him easily censorious in the case of so hardened and so militant an anti-cleric as the Bard. He was personally acquainted, however, with that hero; and his little biography (1797) is neither unintelligent nor ill-written.

[2] Heron himself, no doubt. He 'had the tongues,' and thought himself the better man.

the 'mason-meetings, drinking-matches, and other mischief,' of the year before, the distractions and the triumphs of Edinburgh continued the work which the mistakes and follies of Dumfries were to finish ten years after.

The First Edinburgh Edition.

At last, however, the First Edinburgh Edition appeared (21st April 1787). The issue ran to 2800 copies, and 1500 of these were subscribed in advance. What Burns got for it is matter of doubt. Creech informed Heron that is was £1100—which is a plain untruth; Chambers says £500; Burns himself told Mrs. Dunlop (25th March 1789) that he expected to clear some £440 to £450. (Other impressions were called for in the course of the year, but the Bard had sold his copyright, and had no interest in them.) Whatever the amount,[1] Creech

[1] At the instancing of Henry Mackenzie, Creech paid Burns (23rd April 1787) a hundred guineas for the copyright of the *Poems*, besides subscribing five hundred copies. The Caledonian Hunt subscribed another hundred; and Burns sent seventy to Ballantine for 'a proper person' in Ayr, and wrote from Dunse (17th May) to acknowledge the receipt, from Pattison, the Paisley bookseller, of 'Twenty-two pounds, seven shillings sterling, payment in full, after carriage deducted for ninety copies' more. Twenty-four copies went to the Earl and Countess of Glencairn, twenty to Prentice of Conington Mains, forty to Muir of Kilmarnock, twenty-one to Her Grace of Gordon, forty-two to the Earl of Eglintoun and a certain

was a slow paymaster; and, as Edinburgh was bad for Burns, and Creech was responsible for Burns's detention in Edinburgh, it is impossible not to regret that Burns had not another publisher. Burns in effect, his Second Edition once published, had nothing to do but pocket his receipts,[1] and be gone. This, however, was what Creech

number to the Scots Benedictionaries at Maryborough and Ratisbon, and the Scots Colleges at Douay, Paris, and Valladolid. The subscription price was five, the price to non-subscribers six, shillings: the extra shilling being (Burns to Pattison, *ut sup.*) 'Creech's profit.'

[1] Heron 'had reason to believe that he had consumed a much larger proportion of these gains than prudence could approve; while he superintended the impression, paid his court to his patrons, and wasted the full payment of the subscription money.' In effect, it is hard to see how, coming to Edinburgh with next to nothing in his pocket (the £20 from Wilson could not have gone very far), he could otherwise have lived. It would have been natural enough for him to have accepted gratuities, for the Age of Patronage was still afoot, and relief in this kind would have come as easily (to say the least) to the 'ploughing poet,' howbeit he was the proudest and in some respects the most punctilious of men, as to any other. I find it hard to believe that there were none. But there is no record of any; and a letter (unpublished) of this period in acknowledgment of a gift of money from Mrs. Dunlop is almost painful in its embarrassment of gratitude and discomfort. On the whole, I take it that, however cheaply he lived in Edinburgh, he must of necessity have had to discount his profits, though not to anything like the extent suggested by Heron. Moreover, it is like enough that he spent a certain amount upon his Tours, and it is certain that Mossgiel was a dead loss to him.

could not let him do: so that he went and came, and came and went, and it was not until the March of 1789 that the two men squared accounts.[1]

The return to Mauchline.

The Edition floated, comes a jaunt to the Border (begun 5th May) with Robert Ainslie. Then, by the 9th June, Burns is back at Mauchline, a much richer and a vastly more important person than he left it: able to lend his brother £180; reconciled, too, with Jean and her people, but disgusted, or feigning himself disgusted (for, after the repudiation, he is ever the superior and the injured party in regard to Jean), with the 'mean, servile compliance' with which his advances are met. Follows a tour to the West Highlands, which seems to be largely an occasion for drink and talk; and in July you find him back at Mauchline, boasting how he, 'an old hawk at the sport,' has brought 'a certain lady'—(unknown)—'from her aerial towerings, pop, down at my foot, like Corporal Trim's hat': despite which Jean is presently with child by him for the second

[1] Of the work he did about this time the best is to be found in the *Haggis* and the *Epistles* to Creech and the Guidwife of Wauchope House. What is very much more to the purpose is that he made Johnson's acquaintance, and at once began contributing to the *Musical Museum*.

time. In August he is at Edinburgh, intent on a settlement with Creech, but on the 25th he starts for the Highland tour with his friend Nicol.[1] After a couple of excursions more—one to Ayrshire, to look at certain holdings—he is resolved on quitting Edinburgh, settlement or no settlement, to farm or go to the Indies, as circumstances shall dictate. But it is written that his life shall have another disputable episode and the world an immortal scrap of song :—

'Had we never loved sae kindly,
Had we never loved sae blindly,
Never met or never parted,
We had ne'er been broken-hearted.'

[1] Heron describes Nicol as a man who 'in vigour of intellect, and in wild yet generous impetuosity of passion, remarkably resembled . . . Burns'; who 'by the most unwearied and extraordinary professional toil, in the midst of as persevering dissipation . . . won and accumulated an honourable and sufficient competence'; and who died of 'a jaundice, with a complication of other complaints, the effects of long-continued intemperance.' Burns admired Nicol, named a son after him, and immortalised him as the 'Willie' who 'brew'd a peck o' maut.' He had a generous heart and a brutal temper, with plenty of brains, a great contempt for custom and the Kirk, and what Lockhart calls 'a rapturous admiration of Burns's genius.' The violent vulgarity of his behaviour at Castle Gordon is typical of the man. He bought a little property not far from Ellisland, and, what with pride and vanity and republican independence (so called) and an immitigable turn for liquor, was certainly as bad a neighbour as the Bard could possibly have had.

So in the beginning of December he falls in with Mrs. M'Lehose; he instantly proposes to 'cultivate her friendship with the enthusiasm of religion'; and the two are languishing in Arcady in the twinkling of a cupid's wing.

Clarinda and Sylvander.

She was a handsome, womanly creature—'of a somewhat voluptuous style of beauty': a style the Bard appreciated—lively but devout, extremely sentimental yet inexorably dutiful: a grass widow with children—nine times in ten a lasting safeguard—and the strictest notions of propriety—a good enough defence for a time; but young (she was the Bard's own age), clever, 'of a poetical fabric of mind,' and all the rest. The upsetting of a hackney coach disabled Burns from calling on her for some weeks. But he wrote her letters, and she answered them; and he was Sylvander, and she signed herself Clarinda; and they addressed each other in verse as well as prose; and she said it could never be; and he said that at least he must know her heart was his; and Religion was her 'balm in every woe'; and he gave her his ideas of Deity; and, when they could meet, Clarinda was ever afraid lest she had let Sylvander go too far; and

Sylvander, for his part, was monstrous eloquent about 'Almighty Love'—(he was sometimes dreadfully like his favourite Man of Feeling)—and was 'ready to hang himself' about 'a young Edinburgh widow.' Widow she was not; but her husband, who cared not a snap of the fingers for her, was away in the West Indies; and it may perhaps have suited her lover—who never, so far as is known, was trained to the compromises and the obsequiencies of adultery—to soothe his conscience by making believe that the affair was at the most a simple everyday amour. Clarinda was of another make. In the prime of life, deserted, sentimental, a tangle of simple instincts and as simple pieties, she had the natural woman's desire for a lover and the religious woman's resolve to keep that lover's passion within bounds. It is scarce questioned that she succeeded: though there is a legend that a certain gallant and insinuating little lyric:—

'O May, thy morn was ne'er sae sweet
As the mirk night o' December,
For sparkling was the rosy wine,
And secret was the chamber!
And dear was she I winna name
But I will aye remember!'—

commemorates, not only their final meeting (December 6th, 1791) but also, the triumph of the Bard.[1] In any event she was plainly an excellent creature, bent on keeping herself honest and her lover straight; and it is impossible to read her letters to Sylvander without a respect, a certain admiration even, which have never been awakened yet by the study of Sylvander's letters to her. For Sylvander's point of view, as M'Lehose was still alive, and an open intrigue with a married woman would have been ruin, only one inference is possible: that he longed for the shepherd's hour to strike for the chime's sake only; so that, when he thought of his future, as he must have done anxiously and

Their letters.

[1] Both *Ae Fond Kiss* and *O May, Thy Morn* were sent to Clarinda after the final parting; but the legend is all-too obviously an effect of the very common human sentiment in deference to which so many novels end happily. For the rest, Sir Walter Scott wrote thus on the fly-leaf of a copy of the very scarce Belfast Edition (1806) of the *Letters Addressed to Clarinda by Robert Burns*, now at Abbotsford:—'Clarinda was a Mrs. Meiklehose, wife of a person in the West Indies, from whom she lived separate but without any blemish, I believe, on her reputation. I don't wonder that the Bard changed her 'thrice unhappy name' for the classical sound of Clarinda. She was a relative of my friend the late Lord Craig, at whose house I have seen her, old, charmless and *devote*. There was no scandal attached to her philandering with the Bard, though the Lady ran risques, for Burns was anything but platonic in his amours,' *etc.*

often, he cannot ever have thought of it as Clarinda's, even though in a moment of peculiar exaltation he swore to keep single till that wretch, the wicked husband, died.[1]

Very early in 1788, Jean—brought, she also, some time in the preceding summer 'pop, down at my feet, like Corporal Trim's hat'—was expelled her parents' house and took refuge at Tarbolton Mill. There Burns found her on his return, and thence he removed her to a house in 'Mauchline toun,' to the particular joy, a short while after, of Saunders Tait:—

'The wives they up their coats did kilt,
And through the streets so clean did stilt,
Some at the door fell wi' a pelt
Maist broke their leg,
To see the Hen, poor wanton jilt!
Lay her fourth egg.'[2]

[1] M'Lehose outlived him many years.

[2] Some stanzas later in *B–rns's Hen Clockin in Mauchline*, Saunders (who has been likening Jean to a ship) thus notes her state:—

'Now she is sailing in the Downs,
Calls at the ports of finest towns,
To buy bed hangings and galloons':

and comments with fury on the fact that she 's got, not only 'twa packs o' human leather,' but also

'A fine cap and peacock feather,
And wi't she 's douce,
With a grand besom made of heather,
To sweep her house.'

Follows what is perhaps the most perplexing sequence of circumstances in a perplexing life. To Clarinda, who knew of the affair with Armour, pitied the victim—(this does *not* mean that she wished her married to Burns)—and had sped her shepherd on his homeward way with 'twa wee sarkies' for the victim's little boy: a mistress, be it remembered, to whom he had written (14th February) in such terms as these :—'I admire you, I love you as a woman beyond any one in the circle of creation':—he wrote, a few days after his arrival at Mauchline, that he had 'this morning' (23rd February 1788) 'called for a certain woman,' and been 'disgusted with her,' so that he could not 'endure her.' Though his heart 'smote him for the profanity,' he sought to compare the two; and ''twas setting the expiring glimmer of a farthing taper beside the cloudless glory of the meridian sun.' 'Here,' the Old Hawk continues, '*here* was tasteless insipidity, vulgarity of soul, and mercenary fawning. *There*, polished good sense, Heaven-born genius, and the most gener-

Jean and Clarinda.

It is worth noting that he winds up his lampoon by accusing the gossips at the lying-in of talking scandal of the rankest and reading *The Holy Fair*!

ous, the most delicate, the most tender passion.' This to the contrary, it needs no great knowledge of life, and still less of Burns and Armour, to divine what happened; and it needs as little of Burns at this point in his career to see why he ended his confession to Clarinda thus:—'I have done with her, and she with me.' Eight days after this (3rd March 1788), in a letter to Ainslie, some parts of it too 'curious' for a Victorian page, he tells a different story.[1] 'Jean,' says he, 'I found banished like a martyr—forlorn, destitute, and friendless; all for the good old cause. I have reconciled her to her fate: I have reconciled her to her mother:[2] I have taken her a room: I have taken her to my arms: I have given her a mahogany bed: I have given her a guinea; and I have'—but here Scott Douglas's garbling begins, and Burns's inditing ends; and

A letter to Ainslie.

[1] The letter is best described as a Crochallanism—as something written by one Fencible for the edification of another Fencible, and dealing with its subject in right Fencible style and from the correct Fencible point of view. I am afraid that, like the aforesaid letter to Clarinda, it was designed as what Ainslie himself, then unregenerate, might have called 'a d—d bite.'

[2] Was reconciliation possible without a second offer of marriage? I doubt it.

the original must be read, or the reader will never wholly understand what manner of man the writer was. Then comes an avowal so disconcerting that I cannot choose but disbelieve it, and conclude that it was made for some special purpose. 'But,' says the Old Hawk, 'but, as I always am, on every occasion—I have been prudent and cautious to an astounding degree; I swore her, privately and solemnly, never to attempt any claim on me as a husband, even though anybody should persuade her she had such a claim, which she had not,[1] neither during my life nor after my death. She did all this like a good girl, and . . .' The rest is unquotable. At first consideration, the spectacle of the Bard keeping 'the wish'd, the trysted hour,' with a settled purpose of 'prudence and caution' in his mind, and as it were the materials for swearing in his pocket, in no wise makes for enlightenment. On reflection, however, it becomes evident that Burns wrote thus to Ainslie, whom he had asked to call on Clarinda in his absence, simply that Ainslie might quote her his report of a second (and an entirely super-

[1] This is literally true: the 'unlucky paper' was destroyed.

fluous) act of repudiation on Jean's part:[1] to the end, as I cannot doubt, of using the fact for all it was worth, when he himself appeared upon the scene. That this is at least a possible theory is shown by the terms in which he tells (7th March) the story of his reconciliation to Brown:[2]—'I found Jean with her cargo very well laid in. . . . I have turned her into a convenient harbour where she may lie snug till she unload, and have taken the command myself, not ostensibly, but for a time in secret.' This can only mean that he purposes to marry the girl. For all that, though, he still has hopes of a practical issue to his Edinburgh affair; for in his next letter (writ the same day) to Clarinda, who has reproached him for silence, and at the same time owned that she counts 'all things (Heaven excepted) but lost, that I may win and keep you,' 'Was it not blasphemy, then,' he asks,

Reconciliation with Jean.

[1] There was no need of oaths from Jean: her lover had had his bachelor's certificate in his pocket for months. And such swearing as there was—*was it not all on the other side?*

[2] It is important to note the difference in manner and tone and suggestion between Burns to Brown and Burns to Ainslie. Burns writes to Brown as friend to friend; to Ainslie as Fencible to Fencible—much, in fact, as Swiveller, President of the Glorious Apollos, to Chuckster, Vice of the same sublime Society.

'against your own charms and against my feelings, to suppose that a short fortnight could abate my passion!' With a vast deal more to the same purpose. Three days after, he starts again for Edinburgh, and plunges deeper in desire than ever for his 'dearest angel' (so he calls her on 17th March), the 'dearest partner of his soul' (four days after). 'Oh Clarinda' (same date), 'what do I owe to Heaven for blessing me with such a piece of exalted excellence as you!' He must leave for Ellisland, *viâ* Mauchline, on the 24th; and 'Will you open,' he asks, 'with satisfaction and delight a letter'—('twas all to be limited to letters soon)—'from a man who loves, who has loved you, and who will love you to death, through death, and for ever!' They are to meet the next night, and he is to watch—(right Arcady, this!)—her lighted window: —''Tis the star that guides me to Paradise.' And for him 'the great relish to all is—that Honour—that Innocence—that Religion, are the witnesses and guarantees of our happiness.' Follows a bit of the Bible adapted to their peculiar case; and with an 'Adieu, Clarinda! I am going to remember you in my prayers,' the Old Hawk stoops to his

'Adieu, Clarinda!'

perch for the night. Nothing is known of the last engagement; but apparently the citadel remains inviolate, for the leaguer is raised next day, and the besieger draws off his forces by way of Glasgow. Thence he writes to Brown (26th March) that 'these eight days' he has been 'positively crazed.' And by the 7th April he has made Jean Armour his wife.

His marriage.

An amazing love-story? True. But that love-story it was—that Burns was first and last enamoured of the woman he made his wife—is shown, I think, by the fact that to all intents and purposes he married her twice over. As for Clarinda, well . . .! Clarinda complicates and exhilarates the interest to this extent at least: that if words mean anything, and the Bard be judged by those he wrote, the Bard, had Clarinda been indeed a widow, might at a given moment have found himself incapable of making Jean an honest woman. And had he followed his fancy, not his heart? How had the two Arcadians fared? 'Tis for some future Chambers to divine and say.

VII

MEANWHILE he had taken Ellisland, a farm in Dumfriesshire, of Miller of Dalswinton: with an allowance from his landlord, a worthy and generous man, of £300, for a new steading and outhouses. His marriage at last made formal and public (it seems to have been celebrated by Gavin Hamilton), on the 5th August 1788 the bride and bridegroom appeared before the Session, acknowledged its irregularity, demanded its 'solemn confirmation,' were sentenced to be rebuked, were 'solemnly engaged to adhere faithfully to one another as husband and wife all the days of their life,' and were finally 'absolved from any scandal' on the old account. But the new steading was long a-building. It was not till the 6th November that Burns and Jean set up their rest in Dumfriesshire; and even so, they had to go, not to their own farm-house—(it was not ready for them till the August of 1789)—but, to a place called 'The Isle,' about a mile away from it. Burns had taken Ellisland on the advice of

At Ellisland.

a friendly expert ;[1] but he had had his doubts about the wisdom of 'guid auld Glen's' decision, and these were soon justified. For a time, however, he stuck to his work like a man : conversing much, it would seem, in his leisure with his neighbour Glenriddell, and others, whose honoured guest he was, making and vamping songs, paying some heed to national and local politics, and finding time for letters not a few—among them a long and elaborate criticism on some worthless verses by that crazy creature, Helen Maria Williams.[2] But by the end of July 1789 he had resolved to turn his holding into a dairy farm to be

[1] 'A lease was granted to the poetical farmer' (thus Heron, who knew the country) 'at the annual rent which his own friends declared that the due cultivation of his farm might easily enable him to pay.' But those friends, being Ayrshiremen, 'were little acquainted with the soil, with the manures, with the markets, with the dairies, with the modes of improvement in Dumfriesshire'; they had estimated his rental at Ayrshire rates ; so that, 'contrary to his landlord's intention,' he must pay more for Ellisland than Ellisland was worth. According to the elder Cunningham, Ellisland was a poet's choice, not a farmer's.

[2] Burns was not only a reader himself: he was ever the cause of reading in others. One of his occupations at Ellisland was the foundation and the management of a book-club. He took the keenest interest in the work, was especially careful in selection, and, according to Glenriddell, did whatever must be done himself. Like his father, he believed in education ; and, like his father, he did his best to educate

run by Jean and his sisters, and to take up his Gaugership [1] in earnest; and on the 10th of August, some brief while after the completion of *The Kirk's Alarm*, he learned from Graham of Fintry (whom he had met, in 1787, at the Duke of Athole's, on his Second Highland Tour) that he was appointed Exciseman for that district of Dumfriesshire in which Ellisland is situate. The work was hard, for he had charge of ten parishes, and must ride two hundred miles a week to get his duty done. But by the beginning of December, 'I have found,' he writes, 'the Excise business go a great deal smoother with me than I expected'; and that he 'sometimes met the Muses,' as he jogged through the Nithsdale hills, is shown by the fact that *The Whistle*, the excellent verses on Captain Grose (with whom he made acquaintance at Glenriddell's table), and *Thou Ling'ring Star*, with *Willie Brew'd*, that best of drinking-songs, and

Appointed exciseman.

his kind by all the means which lay to his hand. He held that the peasant could not but be the better for good reading; and he exerted himself to the utmost to give the peasant what seemed to him the best that could be had. That he did so is as honourable a circumstance as is found in his career.

[1] By Glencairn's interest he had been appointed to a place in the Excise as early as 1787.

The Five Carlines (a notable piece of mimicry, if no more), all belong to the period of his probation, and were all written before the end of the year. Plainly, too, he was an officer at once humane and vigilant: since, while it is told of him that he could always wink when staring would mean blank ruin to some old unchartered ale-wife (say), his first year's 'decreet'—his share, that is, of the fines imposed upon his information—was worth some fifty or sixty pounds. Exercise and the open air are held good for a man's health; yet in the winter of 1789-90 this man suffered cruelly from his old ailment. As for verse, the *Elegy on Matthew Henderson* and *Tam o' Shanter* (1790) seem a poor year's output for the poet of those wonderful months at Mossgiel. But work for Johnson was going steadily on; so that the results of these barren-looking times are in a sort the best known of his titles to greatness and to fame. Thus he strove, and faltered, and achieved till 1791, by the beginning of which year he had realised that Ellisland was impossible; that he could not afford his rent, which (so he told Mrs. Dunlop) was raised that year by £20, and must depend entirely on his

'Humane and vigilant.'

Excisemanship: when he asked for service in a port, and, by Mrs. Dunlop's interest, was transferred to 'a vacant side-walk' in Dumfries town. Thither, his landlord setting no manner of impediment in his way, and his crops and gear having been well and profitably sold,[1] he removed himself in December, and established his family in a little house in the Wee Vennel. In Dumfries town.

'Tis a circumstance to note that, beginning at Ellisland as the Burns of *Of A' the Airts*, some time before the end he was the Burns of *Yestreen I Had a Pint o' Wine*.[2] That is, he married Jean in the April of 1788, and some two years after he got Anne Park with child. Jean bore him his second son

[1] The standing crops were 'rouped' in the last week of August. They realised 'a guinea an acre above the average.' But such a riot of drunkenness was 'hardly ever seen in this country.' See Burns to Sloan (Scott Douglas, v. 394) for details and for a confession:—'You will easily guess how I enjoyed the scene; as I was no farther over than you used to see me':—which take you back to the Burns of *The Jolly Beggars*. The stock and gear 'were not sold till August' (Scott Douglas, v. 392). 'We did not come empty-handed to Dumfries,' Mrs. Burns told M'Diarmid. 'The Ellisland sale was a very good one. A cow in her first calf brought eighteen guineas, and the purchaser never rued his bargain. Two other cows brought good prices. They had been presented by Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop.'

[2] I have read somewhere that the first quatrain—the flower of the song—is old; but I cannot verify the description.

(in wedlock) the 9th April 1791 ; and Anne Park had been delivered of a daughter by him ten days before (31st March). Some say that she died in childbed ; some that she lived to marry a soldier. Nobody knows, and, apparently, nobody cares, what became of her. *She* was no 'white rose' (with a legend). She was scarce a 'passion flower' ;[1] and though the Bard himself thought the ditty he made upon her one of his best, the 'episode' in which she played a principal part is not regarded with any special interest by his biographers. She was a tavern waitress, and he was the Bard ; and she pleased him ; and she lived, or died—it matters not which ; and there 's an end on 't. The true interest consists, perhaps, in the magnanimity of Jean, who, lying-in a few days after the interloper, was somehow moved to receive the inter-

[1] Chambers declares that, if Jean had not been away in Ayrshire, there would have been no Elizabeth Burns : which is surely the boldest apology for a husband's lapse, at the same time that it is the frankest admission of this particular husband's inability to cleave to his wife in absence, that has ever been offered to an admiring world. Scott Douglas knocks it on the head, and shows that Chambers's valour is greater than Chambers's sense of history, by proving that neither in the June nor the July of 1790 could Jean have been away.

loper's child, and to suckle it with her own. It is further to note that Anne Park is the last of Burns's mistresses who has a name. That she was not the last in fact you gather from Currie;[1] but this one is innominate. So far as is known, the goddesses of the years to come, the Chlorises and Marias and Jessies:—

> 'Tis sweeter for thee despairing
> Than aught in the world beside':—

are all platonic in practice, if not in idea. The recipe for song-making was soon to be this:—'I put myself in the regimen of adoring a fine woman, and in proportion to the adorability of her charms, in proportion you'—Thomson—'are delighted with my verses.'

The recipe for song-making

[1] He has been roundly and deservedly reproved for the manner and the circumstances in which he published his report—(of an 'accidental complaint')—which, by the way, was started by Heron. For another piece of scandal, whether published or not I do not know—that at Dumfries the Bard walked openly with harlots—it is, of course, entirely unauthenticated; and I here refer to it but for the purpose of pointing out that, if it were true, the fact of such familiarities, however horrifying to respectable Dumfries, would sit lightly enough both on Burns the peasant and on Burns the poet of *The Jolly Beggars* and *My Auntie Jean Held to the Shore*: that, if it were true, the memory of Burns exchanging terms with the light-heels of the port were simply one to set beside the memory of Burton rejoicing in the watermen at the bridge-foot at Oxford.

It was a mistake, so far as the world is concerned. But Burns made it; and by the time it was made, he probably knew no better. In his last years, indeed, the irresponsible Faunus of Mossgiel and Edinburgh becomes a kind of sentimental sultan, who changes, or rewards, his slaves of dream with a magnificence which, edifying or not, is at least amusing. Thus, you find him designing the publication of a book of songs, with portraits of the beauties by whom they are inspired; Maria Riddell is expelled his lyrical harem as with a fork, because she has offended him; Jean Lorimer, she of 'the lint-white locks'—('Bonnie lassie, artless lassie!')—is the Chloris of ditty after ditty, till of a sudden Chloris is a disgusting name, and 'what you once mentioned of "flaxen locks" is just'—so just, indeed, that 'they cannot enter into an elegant description of beauty.'[1] This he discovers in the February

A book of beauties.

[1] Is it not all the Peasant and his womankind? The peasant's women are his equals. The sentiment of chivalry is not included in his heritage; and he treats his associates in that lot of penury and toil which is his birthright as the 'predominant partner,' the breadwinner, the provider of children, may: he punishes, that is, and he rewards. It is unlikely that this was Burns's practice with Jean; but assuredly it was his practice with the 'fine women' of his dreams.

of 1796, in the July of which year he dies. And he keeps up his trick of throwing the lyric handkerchief till the end. All through his last illness he is tenderly solicitous about his wife, be it remembered; yet the death-bed songs for Jessie Lewars are the best of those closing years.

In the result, then, Ellisland was a mistake: not so much because it was a farm, as because it was not Burns's own.[1] He was essentially and unalterably a peasant; and as a peasant-poet, a crofter taking down the best verses ever dictated by the Vernacular Muse, he might, one would like to think, what with work in the fields, and work at his desk, and the strong, persuasive inducements of home, have attained to length of days and peace of mind and the achievement of still greater fame, at the same time that he realised the ideal which he has sublimated in some famous lines:—

'To mak' a happy fireside clime
For weans and wife,
That's the true pathos and sublime
Of human life.'

[1] He would have liked the life well enough, he says, had he tilled his own acres. But to take care of another man's, at the cost, too, of a horrible and ever-recurring charge called rent —that was the devil!

Plainly, though, it could not be. He had too much genius, too much temperament, for it to be: with too much interest in life, which to him, however diverse and however variable his moods, meant, largely, if not wholly, Wine and Women and Song. Also, he had been too hardly used, too desperately driven in his youth, and too splendidly petted and pampered in his manhood, to endure with constancy the work by which the tenant-farmer has to earn his bread. He had seen his father fail at Mount Oliphant and Lochlie; and he had shared his brother's failure at Mossgiel. By no fault of his own, but owing to the circumstance that he had taken a holding out of which he could not make his rent, he failed himself at Ellisland; and though, in his case, there was small risk of 'a factor's snash,' he was infinitely too honest and too proud to take undue advantage of another man's bounty: so, to make ends meet, he turned gauger, and took charge of ten parishes and rode two hundred miles a week in all weathers. It was a thing he 'd always wanted to do, and, at the time he took to doing it, it was the only thing that could profitably be done by him. But his misfortune in having to do it was none the

less for that. It took him from his home, it unsettled his better habits, it threw him back on Edinburgh and his triumphing experience as an idler and a Bard, it led him into temptation by divers ways. And when Pan, his goat-foot father—Pan, whom he featured so closely, in his great gift of merriment, his joy in life, his puissant appetites, his innate and never-failing humanity—would whistle on him from the thicket, he could not often stop his ears to the call. He was the most brilliant and the most popular figure in the district; he loved good-fellowship; he needed applause; he rejoiced in the proof of his own pre-eminence in talk—rejoiced, too, in the transcendentalising effect of liquor upon the talker [1] as in the positive result of his name and fame, his *prestance* and his personality, upon adoring women. Is it not plain that Dumfries was inevitable? Or, rather, is it not plain that, first and last, the life was one logical, irrefragable sequence

Idler and Bard.

[1] He complained (to Clarinda) long ere this of the 'savage hospitality' he could not choose but accept. And, in effect, he had the ill-luck to start drinking at a time when whisky, fire-new from the Highlands, was the fashionable tipple, and was fast superseding ale. Born a generation earlier, when ale and claret were the staple comforters, he had stood a better chance.

of preparations for the death? That Mount Oliphant and Lochlie led irresistibly to Mauchline, as Mauchline to Edinburgh, and Edinburgh to Ellisland, and Ellisland to the house in the Mill Vennel? And is not the lesson of it all that there is none so unfortunate as the misplaced Titan—the man too great for his circumstances? Speaking broadly, I can call none to mind who, in strength and genius and temperament, presents so close a general likeness to Burns as Mirabeau. Born a noble, and given an opportunity commensurate with himself, Burns would certainly have done such work as Mirabeau's, and done it at least as well. Born a Scots peasant, Mirabeau must, as certainly, have lived the life and died the death of Burns. In truth, it is only the fortune of war that we remember the one by his conduct of the Revolution, which called his highest capacities into action, while we turn to the other for his verses, which are the outcome (so Maria Riddell thought, and was not alone in thinking) of by no means his strongest gift.

The misplaced Titan.

VIII

WHATEVER the sequel, it may fairly be said for Ellisland that Burns and Jean were happy there, and that it saw the birth of *Tam o' Shanter* and the perfecting, in the contributions to Johnson's *Museum*, of the Vernacular Song.[1] The last, as we know, was Burns's work; but he had assistants, and they did him yeoman service. He worked in song exactly as he worked in satire and the rest—on familiar, old-established bases; but he did so to a very much greater extent than in satire and the rest, and with a great deal more of help and inspiration from without. I have said that he contributed nothing to Vernacular Poetry except himself, but, his contribution apart, was purely Scots-Traditional; and this is especially true of his treatment of the Vernacular Song.

Johnson's *Museum*.

[1] I say nothing of the numbers sent to Thomson. Very many are copied from the *Museum*, and the others need no here be discussed with even an approach to particularity. A point to note in connection with the contributions both to the *Museum* and to *Scottish Airs* is that Burns was honourably and intensely proud of them. He regarded them as work done in the service of the Scotland whose 'own inspirèd Bard' he was, and neither asked money, nor would take it, for them. To think that he was writing for Thomson to the very end is to have at least one pleasant memory of Dumfries.

What he found ready to his hand was, in brief, his country's lyric life. Scotland had had singers before him; and they, nameless now and forgotten save as factors in the sum of his achievement, had sung of life and the experiences of life, the tragedy of death and defeat, the farce and the romance of sex, the rapture and the fun of battle and drink, with sincerity always, and often, very often, with rich or rich-rank humour. Among them they had observed and realised a little world of circumstance and character; among them they had developed the folk-song, had fixed its type, had cast it into the rhythms which best fitted its aspirations, had equipped it with all manner of situations and refrains, and, above all, had possessed it of a great number of true and taking lyrical ideas. Any one who has tried to write a song will agree with me, when I say that a lyrical idea—by which I mean a rhythm, a burden, and a drift—once found, the song writes itself. It writes itself easily or with difficulty, it writes itself well or ill; but in the end it writes itself. In this matter of lyrical ideas Burns was fortunate beyond any of Apollo's sons. He had no need to quest for them: there they lay ready

The folk-song.

to his hand, and he had but to work his will with them. That they were there explains the wonderful variety of his humours, his effects, and his themes: that he could live and work up to so many among them is proof positive and enduring of the apprehensiveness of his humanity, his gift of right, far-ranging sympathy. It is certain that, had he not been, they had long since passed out of practical life into the Chelsea Hospital of some antiquarian publication. But it is also certain that, had they not been there for him to take and despoil and use, he would not have been—he could not have been—the master-lyrist we know. What he found was of quite extraordinary worth to him; what he added was himself, and his addition made the life of his find perennial. But, much as are the touch of genius and the stamp of art, they are not everything. The best of many nameless singers lives in Burns's songs; but that Burns lives so intense a lyric life is largely due to the fact that he took to himself, and made his own, the lyrical experience, the lyrical longing, the lyrical invention, the lyrical possibilities of many nameless singers. He was the last and the greatest of them all; but

Nameless singers.

he could not have been the greatest by so very much as he seems, had these innominates not been, nor could his songs have been so far-wandered as they are, nor so long-lived as they must be, had these innominates not lived their lyric life before him. In other terms, the atmosphere, the style, the tone, the realistic method and design,[1] with much of the material and the humanity, of Burns's songs are inherited. Again and again his forefathers find him in lyrical ideas, in whose absence there must certainly—there cannot but have been—a blank in his work. They are his best models, and he does not always surpass

An inherited style.

[1] As I have said, realism is the distinguishing note of the Vernacular School; and the folk-singers are not less curious in detail than their literary associates and forebears. Even that long sob of pain, *O, Waly, Waly*, has its elements of everyday life and circumstance :—

> 'My love was clad in the black velvet,
> And I myself in cramasie':—

its references to St. Anton's Well and Arthur's Seat and the sheets that 'sall ne'er be pressed by me.' *Cf.*, too, that wonderful little achievement in romance, *The Twa Corbies* :—

> 'Ye 'll sit on his white hause-bane,
> And I 'll pyke out his bonie blue een,
> Wi' ae lock o' his gowden hair
> We 'll theek our nest when it grows bare.'

Cf., too, in other styles, *Toddlin Hame* and *Ellibanks and Ellibraes* and—well, any folk-song you care to try !

them, as he is sometimes not even their equal.[1] And if his effect along certain lines and in certain specified directions be so intense and enduring as it is, the reason is that they are a hundred strong behind him, and that he has selected from each and all of them that which was lyrical and incorruptible. A peasant like themselves, he knew them as none else could ever know. He sympathised from within with their ambitions, their fancies, their ideals, their derisions, even as he was master, and something more, of their methods. And, while it is fair to say that what is best in them is sublimated and glorified by him, it is also fair to say that, but for them, he could never have approved himself the most exquisite artist in folk-song the world has ever seen.

It has been complained that, thus much

[1] Cf. *O, Waly, Waly* and *The Twa Corbies* and *Helen of Kirkconnel*; with *Toddlin Hame*, which Burns thought 'the first bottle-song in the world,' the old sets of *A Cock-Laird Fu' Cadgie* and *Fee Him, Father*, and, in yet another *genre*, *O, Were My Love*. Even in *The Merry Muses* Burns, who wrote a particular class of song with admirable gust and spirit, does no better work than some of the innominates—the poets of *Erroch Brae* and *Johnie Scott* and *Jenny M'Craw*, for example; while his redaction of *Ellibanks and Ellibraes*—('an old free-spoken song which celebrates this locality would be enough in itself to bring the poet twenty miles out of his way to see it')—is in no wise superior to the original.

of his claim to be original removed, he must henceforth shine in the lyrical heaven with a certain loss of magnitude and his splendour something dimmed. And this is so far true that the Burns of fact differs, and differs considerably and at many points, from the Burns of legend. The one is an effect of certain long-lived, inexorable causes; the other —that 'formidable rival of the Almighty,' who, deriving from nobody, and appearing from nowhere, does in ten years the work of half-a-dozen centuries—is an impossible superstition, as it were a Scottish Mumbo-Jumbo. The one comes, naturally and inevitably, at the time appointed, to an appointed end; but by no conceivable operation in the accomplishing of human destiny could the other have so much as begun to be. And, after all, however poignant the regret, and however wide-eyed and resentful the amazement of those who esteem a man's work on the same terms as they would a spider's, and value it in proportion as it does, or does not, come out of his own belly, enough remains to Burns to keep him easily first in the first flight of singers in the Vernacular, and to secure him, outside the Vernacular, the fame of an

Fact and legend.

unique artist. I have said that, as I believe, his genius was at once imitative and emulous; and, so far as the Vernacular Song is concerned, to turn the pages of our Third Volume is to see that, speaking broadly, his function was not origination but treatment, and that in treatment it is that the finer qualities of his endowment are best expressed and displayed. His measures are high-handed enough; but they are mostly justified.[1] He never boggles at appropriation,[2] so that some of his songs are the oddest conceivable mixture of Burns, Burns's original, and somebody Burns has pillaged. Take, for instance, that arch and fresh and charming thing, *For the sake of Somebody.*

His appropriation.

[1] Not always. See Vol. iii. (p. 96 and Note) for an attempt to improve upon Ayton (or another), and Vol. iii. (p. 42 and Note) for another to improve upon Carew. Both are failures; but only one is in the Vernacular, and neither owns a Vernacular original.

[2] Besides the folk-singers and the nameless lyrists of the song-books, he is found pilfering from Sedley, Garrick, Lloyd, Ramsay, Fergusson, Theobald, Carew, Mayne, Dodsley, and Sir Robert Ayton (or another). See also our Notes (Vol. iii.) on *Duncan Davison*, on *Landlady, Count the Lawin*, on *Sweetest May*, on *The Winter it is Past*, on *We're A' Noddin*, to name but these; and, as a further illustration of his method, note that, according to Scott Douglas (MS. annotation), the first three lines of *Gat Ye Me* belong to old song No. I., the next five to Burns, and the last eight to old song No. II.

In the first place, 'Somebody' comes to Burns as a Jacobite catchword; and in the next, the lyrical idea is found in a poor enough botch by Allan Ramsay:—

'For the sake of Somebody,
For the sake of Somebody,
I could wake a winter's night
For the sake of Somebody.'

This is pretty certainly older than *The Tea-Table Miscellany*, and has nothing whatever to do with the verses which the later minstrel has tagged it withal. But it is a right lyrical idea, and in the long-run a lyrical idea is a song. So thinks Burns; and you have but to compare the two sets to see the difference between master and journeyman at a glance. The old, squalid, huckstering little comedy of courtship:—

Master and journeyman.

'First we'll buckle, then we'll tell,
Let her flyte and syne come to . . .
I'll slip hame and wash my feet,
An' steal on linens fair and clean,
Syne at the trysting place we'll meet,
To do but what my dame has done':—

gives place to a thing to-day as comfortable to the ear and as telling to the heart as when Burns vamped it from Ramsay's vamp

from somebody unknown. What is further to note is that not all the latest vamp is Burns *plus* Ramsay *plus* Innominate I. *plus* Jacobite catchword: inasmuch as the first line of Stanza II. is conveyed from an owlish lover in *The Tea-Table Miscellany*:—

'Ye powers that preside over virtuous love.'

Thus some solemn poetaster a good half-century at least ere Burns; and for over a hundred years 'Ye powers that smile on virtuous love' has lived as pure Burns, and as pure Burns is now passed into the language. Yet, despite the pilferings and the hints, it were as idle to pretend that *Somebody*, as it stands, is not Burns, as it were foolish to assert that Burns would have written *Somebody* without a certain unknown ancestor. Another flash of illustration comes from *It Was A' For Our Rightfu' King*: with its third stanza lifted clean from *Mally Stewart*, and set in a jewel of Burnsian gold, especially contrived and chased to set it off and make the lyric best of it. A third example is found in *A Red, Red Rose*, which, as we have shown (iii. 143 and Note), is a mosaic of rather beggarly scraps of English verse: just as Jonson's

peerless *Drink To Me Only With Thine Eyes* is a mosaic contrived in scraps of conceited Greek prose. It is exquisitely done, of course: but, the beggarly scraps of verse away, could it ever have been done at all? And *Auld Lang Syne*? It passes for pure Burns; but was the phrase itself—the phrase which by his time had rooted itself in the very vitals of the Vernacular—was the phrase itself, I say, not priceless to him? Something or nothing may be due to Ramsay for his telling demonstration of the way in which it should *not* be used as a refrain. But what of that older maker and the line which Burns himself thought worth repeating, and which the world rejoices, and will long rejoice, to repeat with Burns:—

Auld Lang Syne.

> '*Should auld acquaintance be forgot,*
> An' never thocht upon?'

Is there nothing of his cadence, no taste of his sentiment, no smack of his lyrical idea, no memory (to say the least) of his burden:—

> 'On old long syne, my jo,
> On old long syne,
> That thou canst never once reflect
> On old long syne':—

in the later masterpiece? To say 'No'

were surely to betray criticism. And *Ay Waukin, O*—should we, could we ever, have had it, had there been nobody but Burns to start the tune and invent the lyrical idea?

'O, wat, wat,
O, wat and weary!
Sleep I can get nane
For thinkin o' my dearie.

'A' the night I wake,
A' the day I weary,
Sleep I can get nane
For thinkin o' my dearie.'

Thus, it may be, some broken man, in hiding among the wet hags; some moss-trooper, drenched and prowling, with a shirtful of sore bones! Whoever he was, and whatever his calling and condition, he had at least one lyrical impulse, he has his part in a masterpiece by Burns, and his part is no small one.

I might multiply examples, and pile Pelion upon Ossa of proof. But to do so were simply to repeat the *Bibliographical* and the *Notes* to our Third Volume; and in this place I shall be better employed in pointing out that these double conceptions (so to speak), these achievements in lyrical

collaboration, are for the most part the best known and the best liked of Burns's songs, and are, moreover, those among Burns's songs which show Burns the song-smith at his finest. The truth is that he wrote two lyric styles: (1) the style of the Eighteenth Century Song-Books,[1] which is a bad one, and in which he could be as vulgar, or as

Two lyric styles.

[1] He was trained in it from the first. In early youth he carried an English song-book about with him—wore it in his breeches-pocket, so to speak. This was *The Lark*: 'Containing a Collection of above Four Hundred and Seventy Celebrated English and Scotch Songs, None of which are contain'd in the other Collections of the same size, call'd *The Syren* and *The Nightingale*. With a Curious and Copious Alphabetical Glossary for Explaining the *Scotch* words. London. Printed (1746) for John Osborn at the Golden Ball in Pater Noster Row.' 'Tis a fat little book, and as multifarious a collection of Restoration and—especially—post-Restoration songs as one could wish to have. Antiquated political squibs; ballads, as *Chevy Chace*, with *Gilderoy*, the *Queen's Old Soldier*, and *Katherine Hayes*; a number of indecencies from D'Urfey's *Pills*; Scots folk-songs, like *Toddlin Hame* and *The Ewe Bughts*, and *O, Waly, Waly* and *John Ochiltree* and *The Blithesome Bridal*; current English ditties like *Old Sir Simon* and *Phillida Flouts Me*; a song of a Begging Soldier, whose vaunt, 'With my rags upon my bum,' is echoed in *The Jolly Beggars*; much Allan Ramsay; with scattered examples of Dryden, Dorset, Congreve, Alexander Scott, Brome, Prior, Wycherley, Rochester, Farquhar, Cibber—even Skelton; and a wilderness of commonplace ditties about love and drink. On the whole an interesting collection. Particularly if you take it as an element in the education of the lyric Burns.

frigid, or as tame, as very much smaller men;[1] and (2) the style of the Vernacular Folk-Song, which he handled with that understanding and that mastery of means and ends which stamp the artist. To consider his experiments in the first is to scrape acquaintance with *Clarinda, Mistress of My Soul*, and *Turn Again, Thou Fair Eliza*, and *On A Bank of Flowers*, and *Sensibility, How Charming*, and *Castle Gordon*, and *A Big-Bellied Bottle*, and *Strathallan's Lament*, and *Raving Winds Around Her Blowing*, and *How Pleasant the Banks*, and *A Rosebud By My Early Walk*,[2] and many

The Eighteenth Century Song-Book.

[1] Cf. *Their Groves of Sweet Myrtle* (Vol. iii. 252-3 and Note), among other things:—

> 'The slave's spicy forests and gold-bubbling fountains
> The brave Caledonian views wi' disdain;
> He wanders as free as the winds of his mountains,
> Save Love's *willing fetters*—the chains o' his Jean.'

Such achievements in what Mr. Meredith calls 'the Bathetic,' are less infrequent in Burns than could be wished.

[2] It is understood that *Scots Wha Hae* is an essay in the Vernacular (I gather, by the way, that it is one of the two or three pieces by 'the Immortal Exciseman nurtured ayont the Tweed' which are most popular in England). But, even so, one has but to contrast it with *Is There for Honest Poverty*, to recognise that in the one the writer's technical and lyrical mastery is complete, while in the other it is merely academic—academic as the lyrical and technical mastery of (say) *Rule Britannia*. Now, *Is There for Honest Poverty* is *calqué* on a certain disreputable folk-song; while *Scots Wha Hae* is

a thing besides, which, were it not known for the work of a great poet, would long since have gone down into the limbo that gapes for would-be art. In the other are all the little masterpieces by which Burns the lyrist is remembered. He had a lead in *The Silver Tassie*[1] and in *Auld Lang Syne*, in *A Man's a Man* and *Duncan Davison*, in *A Waukrife Minnie* and *Duncan Gray* and *Finlay*, in *I Hae a Wife* and *It Was A' For Our Rightfu' King* and *A Red, Red Rose*, in *Macpherson's Lament*, and *Ay Waukin, O*, and *Somebody*, and *Whistle, and I'll Come to You*—in all or very nearly all, the numbers which make his lyrical bequest as it were a little park apart—an unique retreat of rocks and sylvan corners and heathy spaces, with an abundance of wildings, and here and there a hawthorn brake where, to a sound of running water, the Eternal Shepherd tells his tale—in the spacious and smiling demesne of English Literature. And my contention—that it is

Burns the lyrist.

for all practical purposes the work of an Eighteenth Century Scotsman writing in English, and now and then propitiating the fiery and watchful Genius of Caledonia by spelling a word as it is spelt in the Vernacular.

[1] 'The first four lines are old,' he says, 'the rest is mine' And, in effect, the quatrain is unique in his work.

to Burns the artist in folk-song that we must turn for thorough contentment—is proved to the hilt by those lyrics in the Vernacular for which, so far as we know, he found no hint elsewhere, and in which, so far as we know, he expressed himself and none besides. He had no suggestions, it seems (but I would not like to swear), no catchwords, no lyrical material for *Tam Glen* and *Of A' the Airts*, for *Willie Brewed* and *Bonie Doon*, for *Last May a Braw Wooer* and *O, Wert Thou in the Cauld Blast*,[1] and *Mary Morison*—to name no more. But, if they be directly referable to nobody but himself, they feature his whole ancestry. They are folk-songs writ by a peasant of genius, who was a rare and special artist; and they show that the closer he cleaved to folk-models, and the fuller and stronger his possession by the folk-influence, the more of the immortal Burns is there to-day.

Suggested or not, the songs of Burns were devised and written by a peasant, devising and writing for peasants. The

[1] It is oddly and amusingly illustrative of Burns's trick of mosaic that a line in this charming song :

'The brightest jewel in my crown' :

comes bodily from—*The Court of Equity*!

emotions they deal withal are the simplest, the most elemental, in the human list, and are figured in a style so vivid and direct as to be classic in its kind. Romance there is none in them, for there was none in Burns[1] —'tis the sole point, perhaps, at which he was out of touch with the unrenowned generations whose flower and crown he was. But of reality, which could best and soonest bring them home to the class in which their genius was developed, and to which themselves were addressed :—

Reality not romance.

'Grain de musc qui gît invisible
Au fond de leur éternité' :—

[1] None, or so little that if his Jacobitisms seem romantic, it is only by contrast with the realities in which they occur. The interest of even *It Was A' For Our Rightfu' King* is centred in the vamper's sympathy with, not the romantic situation :—

'He turned him richt and round about
Upon the Irish shore,' *etc.* :—

but with that living, breathing, palpitating 'actuality' of sentiment developed in both hero and heroine by the disastrous turn of circumstances :—

'Now a' is done that man can do,
'And a' is done in vain' :—

and the position created by those circumstances at the end :—

'But I hae parted from my love
Never to meet again' :—

which places this lyric somewhere near the very top of homely and familiar song.

there is enough to keep them sweet while the Vernacular is read. They are for all, or nearly all, the peasant's trades and crafts: so that the gangrel tinker shares them with the spinner at her wheel, the soldier with the ploughman, the weaver with the gardener and the tailor and the herd. Morals, experiences, needs, love and liquor, the rejoicing vigour and unrest of youth, the placid content of age—there is scarce anything he can endure which is not brilliantly, and (above all) sincerely and veraciously, set forth in them. That old-world Scotland, whose last and greatest expression was Burns, either has passed or is fast passing away. In language, manners, morals, ideals, religion, substance, capacity, the theory and practice of life—in all these the country of Burns has changed: in some, has changed 'beyond report, thought, or belief.' But that much of her which was known to her Poet is with us still, and is with us in these songs. For man and woman change not, but endure for ever: so that what was truly said a thousand years ago comes home as truth to-day, and will go home as truth when to-day is a thousand years behind. To the making of these things there went

Old-world Scotland.

the great and generous humanity of Burns, with the humanity, less great but still generous and sincere, of those unknowns, whose namelessness was ever a regret to him.[1] They are art in their kind. And there is no reason why this 'little Valclusa fountain' should lack pilgrims, or run dry, for centuries.[2]

[1] 'Are you not quite vexed to think that these men of genius, for such they certainly were, who composed our fine Scottish lyrics, should be unknown? It has given me many a heartache' (R. B. to Thomson, 19th November 1794). And see his *Journal* for a more heart-felt recognition still.

[2] They lived not long the limited life of Johnson's *Musical Museum* and Thomson's *Scottish Airs*. Thus, in a collection of North of England chap-books (*c.* 1810-20) which I owe to the kindness of the Earl of Crawford, I find at least two Burns 'Songsters'—(they are the same, but one is called 'The Ayrshire Bard's Songster,' the other something else)—both 'Printed by J. Marshall in the Old Fleshmarket,' Newcastle. In a third—a miscellany, this one—is *Scots Wha Hae*, 'As sung by Mr. Braham at the Newcastle Theatre Royal' (Carlyle thought this famous lyric should be 'sung by the throat of the whirlwind'; but it had better luck than *that*). The great Jew tenor further warbled a couple of stanzas of *The Winter It is Past* at a concert in the same city, when Miss Stephens was responsible for *Charlie He's My Darling*. In other chaps Burns is found rubbing shoulders with Moore and Campbell and Tom Dibdin, and a hundred others, among them Allan Ramsay. In these *Of A' the Airts* is sandwiched between *The Twopenny Postman* and the *Wedding at Ballyporeen*, while *Somebody* is kept in countenance by *Paddy Carey* and *The Wounded Hussar*. The most popular, perhaps, are *Of A' the Airts* and *Scots Wha Hae*, and *Willie Brew'd*; but *On a Bank of Flowers* lacks not admirers.

IX

I PURPOSE to deal with the Dumfries period with all possible brevity. The story is a story of decadence; and, even if it were told in detail, would tell us nothing of Burns that we have not already heard or are not all-too well prepared to learn. In a little town, where everybody 's known to everybody, there is ever an infinite deal of scandal; and Burns was too reckless and too conspicuous not to become a peculiar cock-shy for the scandalmongers of Dumfries. In a little town, especially if it be a kind of provincial centre, there must of necessity be many people with not much to do besides talking and drinking; and Burns was ever too careless of consequences, as well as ever too resolute to make the most of the fleeting hour—it may be, too, was by this time too princely and too habitual a boon-companion —to refrain from drink and talk when drink and talk were to be had. In the sequel, also, it would seem that that old jealousy of his betters (to use the ancient phrase) had come to be a more disturbing influence than it had ever been before. He knew, none better, that, however brilliantly the

A story of decadence.

poet had succeeded, the man was so far a failure as an investment, that, with bad health and a growing family, he had nothing to look forward to but promotion in the Excise; and his discontent with the practical outcome of his ambition and the working result of his fame was certainly not soothed, and may very well have been exacerbated, by his rather noisy sympathy with the leading principles of the French Revolution. He was too fearless and too proud to dissemble that sympathy, which was presently (1794) to find expression in one of his most vigorous and telling lyrics; he was, perhaps, too powerful a talker not to exaggerate its quality and volume; and, though it was common, in the beginning at least, to many Scotsmen, its expression got him, as was inevitable, into trouble with his superiors, and in the long-run was pretty certainly intensified, to the point at which resentment is translated into terms of indiscretion and imprudence, by the reflection, whether just or not,[1] that it had damaged

The French Revolution.

[1] It seems to have been unjust. Pitt, though he loved the poetry of Burns, did nothing for him—was probably, indeed, too busy to think of doing anything once the page was read and the bottle done; and Fox, to whom Burns looked for advancement, was ever out of office, and could do nothing,

his chances of promotion. That he fought against temptation is as plain as that he proved incapable of triumph, and that, as Carlyle has wisely and humanely noted, the best for him, certain necessary conditions being impossible, was to die. Syme,[1] who knew and loved him, said that he was 'burnt to a cinder' ere Death took him; we can see for ourselves that the Burns of the Kilmarnock Volume and the good things in the *Museum* had ceased to be some time

even had he been minded to do something, which we are not told that he was. But the Bard had a sure stay in Graham of Fintry; and, though Glencairn was dead, and he was sometimes reprimanded (*et pour cause*), there is no reason to believe that he would have missed preferment had he lived to be open to it.

[1] It has been said, I believe, that Syme's evidence is worthless, inasmuch as it tends to discredit Burns. But one eye-witness, however dull and prejudiced (and Syme was neither one nor other), is worth a wilderness of sentimental historians; and Syme's phrase, howbeit it is so picturesque that it conveys what is, perhaps, too violent an impression, probably means no more than that Burns had damaged himself with drink. That much Burns admitted time and again; and Currie—who cannot but have got his information from Maxwell—remarks that for over a year before the end 'there was an evident decline of our Poet's personal appearance, and, though his appetite continued unimpaired, he was himself sensible that his constitution was sinking.' It was all, the doctor thought, the effect of alcohol on a difficult digestion and a sensitive nervous system; and, though he was something of a fanatic in this matter, I see no reason, as he was also an honest man, to question his diagnosis.

before the end; there is evidence that some time before the end he was neither a sober companion nor a self-respecting husband. And the reflection is not to be put by, that he left the world at the right moment for himself and for his fame.

The poet's apologists.

There is small doubt that the report of his misconduct was at best unkindly framed; there is none that certain among his apologists have gone a very great deal too far in the opposite direction. We may credit Findlater, for instance, but it is impossible, having any knowledge of the man, to believe in the kind of Exciseman-Saint of Gray: impeccable in all the relations of life and never the worse for liquor: even as it is impossible to believe in the *bourgeois* Burns of the latest apotheosis. As Lockhart says, the truth lies somewhere between the two extremes; and one is glad to agree with Lockhart. Even so, however, tradition, as reported by friends and enemies alike, runs stronger in his disfavour than it does the other way.[1] And, though we know that

[1] 'We are raising a subscription (horrid word)'—(thus Sir Walter, to Morritt, 15th January 1814)—'for a monument to Burns, an honour long delayed, perhaps till some parts of his character were forgotten by those among whom he lived.' This was written within twenty years of Burns's death: when

party feeling ran high in Dumfries, and that Burns—with his stiff neck, and his notable distinction, and his absolute gift of speech—did certainly damn himself in the eyes of many by what, in the circumstances, must have seemed a suicidal intemperance of feeling and expression, we know also that, once extremely popular, he was presently cut by Dumfries society; that after a time his reputation was an indifferent one on other counts than politics; and that more than once—as in the case of Mrs. Riddell, and again, when he had to apologise for a toast no reasonable or well-bred man would have proposed in the presence of a King's officer, unless he were prepared to face the consequences—he behaved himself ill, according to the standard of good manners then

the grievance of the Revolution was lost in the shadow cast by the tremendous presence of Napoleon. And, if it be urged that Burns's offending against Toryism must have been rank indeed to be recalled thus bitterly and thus late, it may be retorted that by no possibility can it have been an hundredth part so indecent as the conduct of the Parliamentary Whigs during the life and long after the death of Pitt. Of all men living Burns was entitled to an opinion; of all men living he had the best gift of expression. Well, he had his opinion, and he used his gift; and Dumfries could not forgive him. It is again a question of circumstances. Fox and the rest were honoured Members of His Majesty's Opposition. Burns was only an exciseman.

and now. The explanation in these and other cases is that he was drunk; and, as matter of fact, drink and disappointment were pretty certainly responsible between them for the mingled squalor and gloom and pathos of the end. There is nothing like liquor to make a strong man vain of his strength and jealous of his prerogative—even while it is stealing both away; and there is nothing like disappointment to confirm such a man in a friendship for liquor. Last of all, there needs but little knowledge of character and life to see that to apologise for Burns is vain: that we must accept him frankly and without reserve for a peasant of genius perverted from his peasanthood, thrust into a place for which his peasanthood and his genius alike unfitted him, denied a perfect opportunity, constrained to live his qualities into defects, and in the long-run beaten by a sterile and unnatural environment. We cannot make him other than he was, and, especially, we cannot make him a man of our own time: a man born tame and civil and unexcessive—'he that died o' Wednesday,' and had obituary notices in local prints. His elements are all-too gross, are all-too vigorous and tur-

The pathos of the end.

bulent for that. 'God have mercy on me,' he once wrote of himself, 'a poor damned, incautious, duped, unfortunate fool! the sport, the miserable victim of rebellious pride, hypochondriac imaginations, agonising sensibility and bedlam passions.' Plainly he knew himself as his apologists have never known him, nor will ever know.

His magnificent endowment.

That his intellectual and temperamental endowment was magnificent we know by the way in which he affected his contemporaries, and through the terms in which some of them—Robertson, Heron, Dugald Stewart, and, especially, Maria Riddell—recorded their impression of him; yet we know also that, for all his magnificence, or, as I prefer to think, by reason of its magnificence, it could not save him from defeat and shame. Where was the lesion? What was the secret of his fall? Lord Rosebery, as I believe, has hit the white in saying that he was 'great in his strength and great in his weaknesses.'[1] His master-qualities, this critic very justly notes, were 'inspiration

[1] I note with pleasure that Lord Rosebery knows too much of life, and is too good a judge of evidence, to think of putting a new complexion on the facts of these last, unhappy years. But has he been explanatory enough? What, after all, but failure is possible for strength misplaced and misapplied?

and sympathy.' But if I would add 'and character'—which, to be sure, is largely an effect of conditions—how must the commentary run? There is pride—the pride of Lucifer: what did it spare him in the end? There is well-nigh the finest brain conceivable; yet is there a certain curious intolerance of facts which obliges the owner of that brain, being a Government officer and seeing his sole future in promotion, to flaunt a friendship with roaring Jacobins like Maxwell and Syme, and get himself nicknamed a 'Son of Sedition,' and have it reported of him, rightly or not, that he has publicly avowed disloyalty at the local theatre.[1] There is a passionate regard for women; with, as Sir Walter noted, a lack of chivalry which is attested by those lampoons on living Mrs. Riddell and on dead Mrs. Oswald.

A 'Son of Sedition.'

[1] I do not for an instant forget that here is more circumstance: that he was a true Briton at heart, and that in the beginning his Jacobinism was chiefly, if not solely, an effect of sympathy with a tortured people. But there are ways and ways of favouring an unpopular cause; and Burns's were alike defiant and unwise. Thus Maxwell was practically what most people then called a 'murderer'—of the French King; yet it was while, or soon after, the enormities of the Terror were at their worst, that he became a chief associate of Burns. To some this seems a 'noble imprudence.' Was it not rather pure incontinence of self?

There is the strongest sense of fatherhood, with the tenderest concern for 'weans and wife'; and there is that resolve for pleasure which not even these uplifting influences can check. There is a noble generosity of heart and temper; but there is so imperfect a sense of conduct, so practical and so habitual a faith in a certain theory:—

> 'The heart ay 's the part ay,
> That maks us richt or wrang':—

that in the end you have a broken reputation, and death at seven or eight and thirty, is the effect of a variety of discrediting causes. Taking the precisian's point of view, one might describe so extraordinary a blend of differences as a bad, well-meaning man, and one might easily defend the description. But the precisian has naught to do at this grave-side; and to most of us now it is history that, while there was an infinite deal of the best sort of good in Burns, the bad in him, being largely compacted of such purely unessential defects as arrogance, petulance, imprudence, and a turn for self-indulgence, this last exasperated by the conditions in which his lot was cast, was not of the worst kind after all. Yet the

The good and the bad.

bad was bad enough to wreck the good. The little foxes were many and active and greedy enough to spoil a world of grapes. The strength was great, but the weaknesses were greater; for time and chance and necessity were ever developing the weaknesses at the same time that they were ever beating down the strength. That is the sole conclusion possible. And to the plea, that the story it rounds is very pitiful, there is this victorious answer:—that the Man had drunk his life to the lees, while the Poet had fulfilled himself to the accomplishing of a peculiar immortality; so that to Burns Death came as a deliverer and a friend.

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